A STUDY OF SOCIAL PROBLEMS IN EGYPT

AS DEPICTED BY EGYPTIAN NOVELISTS

FROM 1919-1960

by

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ABSTRACT

The thesis is a study of the social problems in Egypt between 1919 and 1960 emphasising the distribution of wealth, corruption, the position of women, and the prevalence of ignorance.

The ways in which and the extent to which Egyptian novelists treated these problems are described, analysed and examined.

The novel in Egypt has shown fairly continuous development in technique during the forty years covered by the present work and has established itself as a recognized form of Adab. It is characterised by a kind of 'localised realism'.

While most of the novelists, whose works form the basis of this study, could be considered as social novelists, in the sense that they depict Egyptian society, very few of them have dealt with the problems at all fundamentally. Big segments of society with their associated problems, such as the workers, soldiers, children, students, servants, the unemployed etc., are surprisingly and unjustifiably missing from the strata portrayed by the novelists.

It is notable that with perhaps one or two exceptions, no social problem has been taken as the central theme of a novel. In fact, social problems, even the most serious and urgent ones, such as poverty, ignorance and disease, have in most instances been mentioned throughout the novel as part of the general atmosphere or 'local environment'. The acute and chronic suffering of the masses has rarely been exposed.

In relation to the magnitude of the social problems and to the speed of development throughout the world in modern times, the social novelist in Egypt still shows a lack of deep concern, of real insight, of radical understanding, and appears to be without philosophy or vision.

His message is often unimposing and is rarely given explicitly. It has very frequently been too late and has almost never had the effect of rousing the public conscience.

A C K N O W L E D G M E N T S

I wish to express my gratitude to Professor C. F. Beckingham for his guidance, for reading the whole of this thesis and for the corrections he patiently made.

I wish also to thank Mr. D. Cowan for kindly reading the first two chapters.

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C O N T E N T S

INTRODUCTION

As the title indicates, the present work is a socio-literary study of Egypt from 1919 to 1960. The aim from the outset has been to throw light both on the novelists and on conditions in Egypt, by trying to see these conditions through the novelists' eyes, at the same time applying any knowledge we have of the background from other sources, thereby trying to discover, examine and assess the extent of the novelists' awareness of and reaction to the main problems in the world around them. This approach to literature has necessitated a study of the Egyptian background.

In a country as old in its civilization as Egypt such a study means to a sociologist a thorough dissection of the whole social structure. Old and stable societies that go back in history for fifty or sixty centuries without discontinuity as Egyptian society does, present very difficult and intricate problems for the sociologist. This is because what are known as social problems or social evils have become with the passing of time part and parcel of the very norm of the individual's life and the accepted characteristics of the society as a whole. Such examples lead in many instances to a considerable number of social problems, their aspects, causes or effects being overlooked or passed over unnoticed by the ordinary researcher especially if he is a member of the society which he studies. On the other hand diagnosing, analysing, exposing and suggesting remedies for acute and chronic social problems

become imperative when such ancient societies try to catch up with the train of modernization.

However, while a sociologist presents his study in the form of data and information classified according to a purely scientific, and thus detached outlook, a novelist who makes a study of society exposes the social ills through the characters and situations he presents. He should enable the reader to experience directly the sufferings, injustices and ambitions of the individual and society, which statistics can only feebly suggest, through the validity of the characters and situations he depicts. The method of incorporating a message in the literary form of the novel differs according to the author's aim and talent. A character may become a symbol of a whole way of life or serve simply as a mouthpiece for the author's views. A certain situation in the novel apparently concerned with the romantic plot may become charged with social or religious significance. Contrast of character, of ideas, of actions or of background may serve to underline what the author wishes to say.

Writers, novelists, artists usually form the 'élite of awareness' in a society, and as such must be able to express the very depths of the human suffering that results from social ills, as well as the highest aspirations of man and society towards a better future, by presenting the deeper implications of life. The authenticity of the revelation depends on the degree of their insight into and understanding of life. Hence the study of social problems

as depicted by various forms of art, in our case the novel, gains significance because it serves as an illustration and measure of the impact the problems have on the individual, by reflecting his and society's inner self, a thing rarely attempted by a social researcher. Moreover a novel hopes to reach a wider audience, an audience which will not necessarily be interested in abstract investigations. In addition, such a study measures and defines qualitatively and quantitatively the degree of awareness, understanding and concern of the artistic élite, which in turn will help to determine the degree of awareness of society to its deficiencies and problems. By shedding light upon dark places, it not only reveals them to the public conscience, but - what is far more important - conveys light and awakens eyesight in the victims themselves. In this concept a social novel serves as a 'theatre' where society, the author included, is psychoanalysed.

This process of social psycho-analysis presented through the novel is of great relevance to the processes of change and remedy the society has to undergo. Historically it was and is relevant to the process of change which may extend over a spectrum that starts with charity, passes through social reform programmes and ends with a complete revolution.[1]

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1. This process is clearly detected in the works of Dickens, Tolstoy, Chekhov and Gorky respectively.

In the main, this thesis attempts to use historical evidence to furnish a framework of reference against which the novels as a source of information on the prevailing conditions of the period will be examined and assessed. Such an approach inevitably regards the novels under study as concerned with the state of things in Egypt, an assumption built on the writers' declared commitment towards society.

Najīb Maḥfūẓ on being questioned as to the prominent characteristics of that stage of his writing, said:

> ". . . a clear interest in social ideas, evoked by a feeling of economic and political persecution as illustrated in al-Qāhira al-Jadīda, Khān al-Khalīlī, Zuqāq al-Midaqq, Bidāya wa Nihāya, and ending with the trilogy, which is a study starting with the modern history until today, and in which socialism has crystallized as a goal for our development, and a remedy for the ills of our society."[1]

Over a quarter of a century earlier, Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm declared that social writers in the past as in the present are those who pave the way for reforms and social changes in the future. He referred the delay of the social reform movement in Egypt to the shortcomings of Egyptian writers and men of letters, then forcefully "accused" Egyptian literature "of this crime".[2] Tāhā Ḥusain was no less specific on the subject of literature and life. "I do not know how a man of letters can be truly so without his

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1. Farūq Shūsha, "Ma' al-Udabā'", an interview with Najīb Maḥfūẓ, al-Ādāb, No. 6, 1960, p. 18.
2. Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm, Taḥta Shams al-Fikr (Cairo, n.d.), p. 193.

portraying life."[1]

This explicit commitment of these and other novelists is of great importance in analysing their work, assessing it, and in passing any judgement on their success or failure. Their statements have made it possible for the critic or student to evaluate their work in terms of contribution and success. The object here is to establish how successful the novelists have been in presenting Egypt's social problems and to what depth and extent they have been able to tackle them, their degree of radicalism and their main interests. Stress in this thesis will be on the content of the novels rather than on form and style. The latter, however, will be considered though only briefly.

To achieve the above-mentioned objective a great deal of reading on social, sociological, political and economic subjects was necessary in order to obtain the relevant information and statistics necessary for assessing the authenticity of the portrayal. Paucity of data in the social field caused considerable difficulty. It is not surprising that authentic data are always lacking in underdeveloped countries, where illiteracy, lack of communications, traditions and local administration do not allow the easy gathering of information. Yet the many books written on Egypt make the absence of surveys of its social problems very regrettable.

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1. Ṭāhā Ḥusain, "Nahḍatunā al-Adabiyya wa mā Yanquṣuhā", al-Hilāl, No. 12, December, 1967, p.183.

On the other hand to the best of the writer's knowledge almost all published material on the novel in Egypt deals mainly with the form, technique and development of the novel rather than with the subject matter and its relevance to social reality.

The choice of dates, 1919-1960, to limit the period, requires some explanation. Neither of them represents a definite social or technical (concerning the novel and the novelists) demarcation line. However their relevance can be explained as follows. The year 1919 marks the Egyptian national uprising considered by almost all Egyptians, politicians, historians and writers alike, as a significant political landmark in Egypt's modern history. With the exception of Zainab by Muḥammad Ḥusain Haykal, which made an unobtrusive entry into the world of literature in 1914, there was nothing that could be considered technically acceptable as a novel before 1919. In his book Taṭawwur al-Riwāya al-ʿArabiyya al-Ḥadītha fī Miṣr (1870-1938), ʿA. Badr considers the year 1919 as the onset of what he terms "al-Riwāya al-Fanniyya", meaning the "novel proper".[1] Many Egyptian writers, thinkers and novelists saw the 1919 "revolution" as a release of national forces that inspired artists and writers "... in the lap of this revolution the music of Sayyid Darwīsh and the literature of the new school

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1. ʿAbd al-Muḥsin Ṭāhā Badr, Taṭawwur al-Riwāya al-ʿArabiyya al-Ḥadītha fī Miṣr, 1870-1939 (Cairo, 1963), pp. 200-202; also see below p.28

grew . . . both rose out of an urgent need for the creation of popular art of true sentiment . . . of realist literature . . . ."[1]

The year 1952 would have been a good choice with which to close an era. But quite a number of the best novels portraying society were published after 1952, and belong in essence to the spirit of the earlier period. The change in regime did not become evident in the novel until later. Moreover the early years of the new regime were mainly occupied in a national evacuation of foreign bases, the Suez War etc. rather than social struggle. In 1960 the First Five Year Plan came into operation aiming at doubling the national income in ten years, the mainstay of this Plan was the High Dam at Aswan.[2] On the whole then, since this thesis is concerned with the study of social problems, 1960 seems a more satisfactory choice with which to close the period and start a new one, especially as the National Charter was also issued in 1962 with the intention of transforming Egypt's social and economic structure into "Arab Socialism".[3] Important also is a marked change in the atmosphere of the novels after 1960, which places them beyond the scope of the present study.

The present work is based mainly on the novels published within the period mentioned above. A certain limitation is observed

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1. Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī, Fajr al-Qissa al-Miṣriyya (Cairo, 1960), pp. 75-76; also Fārūq Shūsha, "Maʿ al-ʾUdabāʾ, Maḥmūd Taymur", al-Ādāb, No. 9, September, 1960, p. 11.
2. P.J. Vatikiotis, The Modern History of Egypt (London, 1968), p. 398.
3. Ibid., p. 403.

in regard to the type of novel to be considered. Only novels which reflect a true Egyptian atmosphere and which have a direct bearing on social questions will be considered. Those works which are not concerned with the study of organization of society, or in which social issues are of secondary importance are excluded. A certain degree of technical maturity has also been required in the novels chosen. However, as the genre is a new form of art in Arabic literature, novels which contain rich social material have been considered, even though technically they may not have reached the required standard.

In the following chapters, major social problems in Egypt as seen by non-novelists, will be examined in the light of what the novelists have written. Chapter I consists of two parts. Part I sets the scene of modern Egypt against which the novelists moved and worked. Part II deals with the Egyptian novelists and their novels. A short biography of the novelists concerned is given when relevant, followed by a compact, fairly critical presentation of each novelists's major works. It is believed that this chapter will help to prevent unnecessary repetition of material in the following chapters.

The first major problem, that of Distribution of Wealth, is treated in Chapter II. Although the title sounds like pure economics, yet bearing in mind the fundamental dynamic mutual interaction of socio-economic forces, the economic data are used to emphasise the social implications of the distribution of wealth. It is also

necessary in order to find out the degree of acuteness of the problem and consequently to measure the extent of concern and commitment of the novelists. The aspects as well as the outcome of the distribution of wealth, i.e., poverty, housing and health conditions, etc., are discussed in considerable detail.

Chapter III is devoted to the problem of Corruption, mainly in organizations and governmental institutions and in the administration. Ostensibly, corruption in government institutions may look like an administrative problem of a technical nature, but in essence as will be shown in due course it is an accurate and informative reflection of the very socio-politico-economic problems of the whole society.

In Chapter IV, the problem of Woman is discussed in detail. In an underdeveloped country with well-established complicated traditions, the position of women constitutes one of the major social problems. Woman as an individual in society, her relation with man, marriage, divorce, family ties, emancipation and equality, all reflect internal social ills and conflicts. Moreover, woman constitutes one of the chief axes around which a great number of novels revolve.

Ignorance as a social problem is dealt with in Chapter V. Myths, superstitions, traditions, etc., are examined. In a country like Egypt these social deficiencies play a considerable role in forming the outlook of the individual and of society as a whole.

Finally, the relevant conclusions of this study are enumerated.

CHAPTER I

PART I

The Setting

> "Like other backward countries trying to carry out a nineteenth-century economic revolution in a twentieth-century social context, Egypt faces several great obstacles. Some of these are economic, some technical; others are political, social, or cultural."[1]

Since the novelists we shall be considering depicted the people of their time and the conditions in which they were living, it is worthwhile to give a brief survey of the period concerned. No comprehensive account of the developments which produced the twentieth-century setting will be attempted here. They will be described in detail in the following chapters. Although the year 1919 has been chosen as the starting point of this study, it is essential to understand the preceding hundred years, for the atmosphere of the twenties was the produce of earlier changes.

Ever since Napoleon Bonaparte's "meteoric invasion"[2] (1798) the nation "started unceasingly on to the road to change."[3]

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1. Charles Issawi, Egypt at Mid-Century (London, 1954), p. 93.
2. H.A.R. Gibb, Arabic Literature (2d. ed. rev.; Oxford, 1963, p. 159.
3. Abu al-Futouh Ahmad Radwan, Old and New Forces in Egyptian Education (New York,1951), p. 15.

Under Muḥammad ʿAlī the military power of the Mamluks was destroyed; the feudal economy was changed into a state controlled economy and drastic centralization took place.[1] The changes necessitated a new system of education differing from the traditional Islamic education in purpose, form and content.

The educational missions sent to Europe during Muḥammad ʿAlī's reign, began to bear fruit in the second half of the century. Diverse European works were translated. Western plays were adapted and drama groups formed. Newspapers and periodicals founded by the Syrian and Lebanese immigrants were soon followed by Egyptian productions. These proved to "be the real forcing-bed of modern Arabic literature."[2] The small circle of Syrian and Lebanese immigrants proved also instrumental in spreading an interest in Western scientific, social and political thinking. Conflict arose between the advocates of a return to the past and those who felt that reform could only be achieved by adopting Western methods. Progressive views often met with hostility from conservative elements. The impact of European culture could be discerned in the attempts by Muḥammad ʿAbduh at "reforming religion", removing the superstitious accretions and advocating a return to the primitive purity of Islam.[3]

The second half of the nineteenth century saw foreign influence grow as the number of foreigners increased rapidly, helped by Saʿīd

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1. Issawi, op. cit., pp. 20, 21, 24.
2. H.A.R. Gibb, op. cit., p. 160.
3. Badr, op. cit., p. 37.

and Ismā'īl's pro-Western sentiments and in particular the latter's desire to see Egypt as part of Europe.[1] This hastened the process of integrating the country as "an agricultural unit" into the international politico-economic system and centralization was carried even further.[2]

The end of the nineteenth century saw the beginning of the Egyptian nationalist movement. The economically and politically restricted emerging middle-class, predominantly of Egyptian stock, and the most enlightened sector of the community,[3] formed the vanguard of the nationalist movement. Rural and urban labourers had not attained political consciousness and up to 1913 the movement had not spread to the countryside.[4] Calling for independence and constitutional government it concentrated its attacks on the British. The Nationalists as a party remained active until 1952, but "ceased to constitute an important bloc in Egyptian politics after the rise of the Wafd"[5] in 1919.

Three major events mark the political history of Egypt in the first half of the twentieth century. First, the 1919 uprising and the formation of the Wafd, the party which dominated the Egyptian

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1. Issawi, op. cit., p. 18.
2. Ibid., p. 26.
3. Ibid., p. 42.
4. Ibid., pp. 46-47.
5. From a study by Arthur Goldschmidt, Jr., "The Egyptian Nationalist Party 1892-1919", in Social and Political Change in Egypt, ed. P.M. Holt (London, 1968), p. 331.

scene till 1952 (later all parties were abolished). Second, the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1936, disclosing the weaknesses in the Wafd and leading to the formation of more extremist groups (the Muslim Brothers and Young Egypt). Third, the failure to institute social reforms during that period, an atmosphere charged with endless political squabbles, the continual change of cabinets and the dangerous economic situation, led to the downfall of the existing régime. A successful coup d'état was carried out in 1952 by a group of army officers, bringing to an end the 150 years old dynasty of Muḥammad ʿAlī.

Through a remarkable degree of national solidarity the 1919 uprising led eventually to the termination of the British protectorate in 1922 and the establishment of a constitutional monarchy in 1923. Independence was far from complete. The British retained effective control not only over the country's foreign policy but also over its internal affairs,[1] despite the apparently greater freedom in domestic policy of the new government. Moreover the constitution heralded an era of political instability with grave consequences to the nation as a whole, by transplanting a system of government to a people unprepared for it. For Egypt had been under authoritarian rule for centuries, deprived of a true social and political education. The representative system provided by the constitution was not the outcome of historical events and economic needs, hence the weakness of the political parties. Their raison d'être was not in answer to

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1. F. Harbison and I. Ibrahim, Human Resources for Egyptian Enterprise (New York, 1958), p. 10.

the country's social and economic circumstances. No political, economic and social programmes were drawn up. Any precise policy regarding national life was lacking. They pursued the politics of "personalities and of personal ulterior motives."[1] Extravagant political promises were made and dissidence in social and religious affairs for personal and party use was encouraged.[2] They plunged into ceaseless futile disputes, at the expense of public interest.

It was not only that the lack of national consciousness and political education led to a government based "upon the bias of persons for one another, rather than their adherence to principles."[3] The very fact that the constitution of 1923 provided for the rule of the great landlords in the Senate as well as in the Chamber of Deputies created deplorable living conditions in Egypt. In a country whose economy is largely agricultural and where the majority of the population are engaged in cultivating the land, the land tenure system is a vital issue in regard to the prosperity of the country as a whole. The extremely unequal distribution of landownership in Egypt which permitted three-quarters of the 4 million actively occupied in agriculture to own under one faddan each while until 1952 less than 0.50 per cent[4] owned half of the cultivated land, illustrates the great inequality in the distribution of income. Nor does the distribution of ownership reflect the full extent of inequality. About

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1. Mirrit Boutros Ghali, The Policy of Tomorrow (Michigan, 1953), p. 6.
2. Ibid., p. 10.
3. Ibid., p. 7.
4. D. Warriner, Land and Poverty in the Middle East (London, 1948), p. 35.

one and a half million families of the farm population owned no land at all, living by share-cropping or casual labour.[1] "Everything that has happened in the Nile Valley in the past century has strengthened the power of the landlord class,"[2] writes Miss Warriner, from the founding of the big estates by Muḥammad 'Alī, to foreign intervention and the construction of the elaborate and efficient system of barrages, dams and canals, which made it possible to grow two or three crops in the year, and greatly expanding cotton cultivation, the main source of the landlords' wealth and the "semi-slave" condition of the peasant.[3]

Intense interest in the land was not accompanied by measures to improve the condition of the rural masses. The ruling class, the large landholders, in order to distract attention from internal evils tended to mobilize political forces into anti-British movements. The whole trend of political development until 1952 had been "to increase the hold of the big landholders and prevent any change."[4]

With the existing distribution of wealth and power, no measure of land reform was likely. No real interest was shown in the condition of the peasant until the end of the Second World War. Nutritional deficiencies caused by a low income, insanitary living and working environment exposed the rural masses to various diseases

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1. Ibid., p. 25.
2. Ibid., p. 49.
3. Ibid., p. 50.
4. Ibid., p. 50.

and epidemics. Bilharzia, chronic eye diseases, dysenteries, enteric fevers, tuberculosis, syphilis, are all found at "extremely high levels in the village population".[1] The high death toll[2] during the malaria epidemic - not a fatal illness - highlighted the horrible living conditions of the rural masses. For the first time the distribution of land became a subject to be discussed in Parliament. But no positive steps were taken to remedy the situation. The concern for the peasant's welfare did not go beyond verbal pronouncements. No workable legislation was ever passed. Reform bills introduced by more far sighted members in 1945 and 1950 were decisively rejected,[3] by a Parliament dominated by powerful landlords. The gap between the wealthy landowners and the peasant masses was widening. The social cleavage was aggravated by an almost total lack of contact between landlords and peasants. The former managed their estates through overseers or directing agencies, while they spent their time in the city or abroad.[4]

The dire poverty of the masses was further increased by the high birth rate. Egypt's population has more than doubled within the last fifty years, whereas the cultivable land has increased by only 16 per cent.[5] Agriculture was already highly developed as a result of perennial irrigation and extensive use of fertilizers and an increase in production. Productivity per capita was on the decline

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1. Weir, in Journal of Egyptian Public Health Association, 1952, p. 109, quoted in Issawi, Egypt at Mid-Century, p. 88.
2. G. Baer, A History of Landownership in Modern Egypt, 1800-1950 (London, 1962), p. 202.
3. Issawi, op. cit., p. 135; see also Baer, op. cit., p. 212.
4. H.H. Ayrout, The Egyptian Peasant, trans. John Alden Williams (Boston, 1963), p. 19.
5. Harbison and Ibrahim, op. cit., p. 15.

because of the ever increasing number of people on the land. The land tenure system, the limited cultivable area and the pressure of the population caused an increasing stream of surplus rural masses to flow to the cities in search of work. The influx resulted in the growing number of unemployed in the cities. Moreover surplus labour supply kept the workers' wages down. "As long as the industrial labour market continues to be flooded by cheap rural labour it is futile to seek to enforce higher standards."[1] wrote Issawi. The increase in the number of immigrants also aggravated the housing conditions in the popular quarters of cities like Cairo and Alexandria. Overcrowding and a rural way of life worsened existing slum conditions in desperate need of sanitary reform.

Land reclamation and industrialization as a possible means of raising the standard of living of the population have only been seriously contemplated by the new régime since 1952. Before that date land reclamation was very slow and stopped completely during the war.[2] Industrialization was also limited and could by no means absorb the 'surplus' rural population. Several factors combined to delay the growth of industry before the 1930s, high cotton prices, the fact that people with capital preferred to invest in land as a matter of prestige and, not least, the customs duties to which the government was bound by international conventions. Interest in

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1. Issawi, op.cit., p.251.
2. D. Warriner, op.cit., p.46.

industrialization grew with the tariff reform of 1930 and the great fall in cotton prices during the depression.[1] As with agriculture, industry was largely in the possession of a few wealthy families, and up to the Second World War, the industrial and financial middle class was predominantly foreign.[2]

The growth of industry did not signify in Egypt as it did in the West the emergence of a new industrial middle class challenging the landowners. Curiously enough, it strengthened and enriched the landowning upper class by an amalgamation of both. The common vested interests of landowners and industrialists led to no internal conflict between the two groups, thus further hindering any attempts at agrarian reform. With the expansion of industry, laws for better working conditions, though not for higher wages, were promulgated.[3] Their enactment was facilitated by "the fear of Communism and the fact that Egyptian landlords ... have not been averse to social reforms affecting only the urban population."[4] However, enforcement lagged behind legislation, and the high cost of living while prices remained low during the Second World War provoked a series of strikes.[5] Nevertheless industrial wages were still higher than earnings from agricultural labour, acting as an incentive for the rural masses to shift towards the towns. Expansion of industry

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1. Issawi, op.cit., p.141.
2. Ibid., p.259.
3. Ibid., pp. 170-171, 175-177.
4. Ibid., p.177.
5. Ibid., p.173.

depended largely on the expansion of the internal market. The latter is determined by the low level of earnings of the rural masses. Without a change in the land tenure system, no increase in earnings was likely.

A decisive step towards the solution of this 'vicious circle' was taken with the passing of the agrarian reform law of 1952 by the new military régime. The power of the old ruling class with its roots in the big estates was broken by the liquidation of large landholdings. "We have wiped out agrarian feudalism (iqṭā') in order to eliminate political feudalism",[1] was not an uncommon phrase in the speeches delivered by the officers of the new régime. In economic terms the significance of the reform is a "redistribution of income in favour of the fellahin."[2] It aimed at the redistribution of requisitioned property, the reduction and control of rents and the raising of agricultural wages. By committing itself to agrarian reform, the new régime was faced with Egypt's "critical dilemma", the "problem of space".[3] The High Dam was conceived as a solution by increasing the cultivated area and by helping industrial expansion. The latter was and is considered by the new régime as providing the best avenue for economic development as well as being a symbol of "national grandeur".[4] Birth control was advocated. But even were a sustained campaign pursued no immediate results could

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1. Lt. Col. Ḥusain al-Shāfi'ī in al-Ahrām, 29 April 1953, quoted by G. Baer, Landownership, pp. 220-222.
2. D. Warriner, op. cit., p. 15.
3. Harbison and Ibrahim, op. cit., p. 15.
4. Ibid., p. 4.

expected. Despite the intentions and achievements of the new régime Egypt's economic and social problems are far from being solved.

Once Egypt gained partial independence, a law was passed in 1923 providing free and compulsory elementary education for all between the ages of 7 and 12. In 1949 the dual system of education was abolished.[1] Educational opportunities have been largely increased by the new régime since 1952. But because of the country's peculiar economic conditions no proper enforcement of the laws was possible.[2] Over 75 per cent of the population are still illiterate.[3]

There are no landmarks that measure improvement in the status of women. A slow and steady progress in the social field, especially among the middle class in the urban areas has been achieved. But no change has occurred in her legal status. The emancipation of women has aroused and still does arouse fierce opposition.[4]

Till the end of the Second World War Egypt's intellectual élite consisted of a few "good jurists, a few competent irrigation engineers, and a handful of historians, and some excellent physicians".[5] Men of letters were mainly men of a "thousand arts".[6] No serious thought on social and economic problems could be detected. With the expanding laboratory and research facilities the level of the élite has been raised to some extent. But it is still difficult to speak

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1. See chapter V, p. 430.
2. See chapter II, pp. 209, 235-236.
3. See chapter V, p. 471.
4. See chapter IV, pp. 342, 347, 349, 387.
5. C. Issawi, op.cit., p.65.
6. Ibid., p.65.

of original contributions to science and philosophy, as there is hardly one work that has had any profound influence on the thinking of the period. The cultural pattern of Egypt is an ad hoc mixture of old and new ways of life, Eastern and Western. This cultural crisis in Egypt, according to Radwan's apt reasoning, is the outcome of the age of science "for whilst science is changing the material world in which the Egyptians live, in many respects their social and moral outlook lags far behind."[1]

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1. A.F. Radwan, op. cit., p. 155.

CHAPTER I

PART II

Introduction

The Rise of the Novel

> "And the wind blowing from Europe carried a seed alien to Arab society, the seed of the story. Its first knowledge thereof was by way of translation. Comparing between the coming seed and what they had at hand, the men of letters felt the great difference between the two. What was at hand did not exceed a few romances, the thousand and one nights and the maqāmāt. The latter were studied only as language documents sunk in the embellishments of naḥw and badīʿ."[1]

It is difficult to speak of a development of the novel in the strict sense, as its progress has been sporadic up to the end of the Second World War. Only by stretching the term "novel" is it possible to include a wide range of work with a fictional framework but which as far as plot and characterization go - two aspects of narrative technique of special importance - are often not novels at all. However, the first attempts, whether didactic in

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1. Yaḥyā Haqqī, Fajr al-Qiṣṣa al-Miṣriyya, pp. 17-18. According to ʿAbd al-Majīd, the maqāma might be called the first "genuine form of short story in Arabic", which appeared for the first time in the tenth century A.D. Subject was "subordinate to treatment and substance to style". The latter was very elaborate and artificial rhymed prose. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz ʿAbd al-Majīd, The Modern Arabic Short Story (Cairo, 1956), pp. 39-41.

intention or recreational, paved the way for the appearance of the novel proper[1] and more important, popularized the new genre among the reading public.

By the latter half of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth a wide range of Western fictional work had been translated, particularly by Syrian emigrés. The success of the new genre encouraged Syrians as well as Egyptians to try their hand at imitating the translated novels with the aim of entertaining the reading public. In addition, the "historical novel" based on a mixture of historical events and adventure was introduced and made popular by the efforts of Jurjī Zaidān[2] (1861-1914).

The sharp reversion of the revivalists to classical Arabic literature as a reaction against anything Western, which had come to be identified by the end of the nineteenth century with colonization, led to the adaptation of the maqāma form to what could be clasified with reservations as a novel. However, whereas the aim

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1. This term has been used here to indicate the narrative embodiment of a primary convention that "the novel is a full and authentic report of human experience, and is therefore under an obligation to satisfy its reader with such details of the story as the individuality of the actors concerned, the particulars of the times and places of their actions, details which are presented through a more largely referential use of the language than is common in the literary forms." I. Watt, The Rise of the Novel (London, 1962), p. 33.
2. Jurjī Zaidān declared in his introduction to his novels that he saw them as a source of history. He was intent that they should cover all stages of Arab history from pre-Islamic times to the present age. He started with Fatāt Ghassān in which events take place in the pre-Islamic era, and ended the 'series' with a novel on the Ottoman coup d'état in 1908. He wrote 22 novels to cover this wide historic span. See Badr, op. cit., pp. 93-96.

of the first group of writers mentioned above was to entertain the reader, and Jurjī Zaidān's novels offered a mixture of recreation and education, the third group used the maqāma in a modified form for expressing their ideas on society and the injustices of that society. Outstanding in this field and still popular is Ḥadīth ʿĪsā b. Hishām by Muḥammad Ibrāhīm al-Muwailiḥī (1858-1930). It approaches most closely in conception and treatment to the novel, and was a big step forward when compared to earlier writings of Rifāʿa al-Ṭahṭāwī (1801-73) and ʿAlī Mubārak[1] (1823-93) during the nineteenth century, the contents of which were distinguished by their purely didactic aim, whilst technically they fell far short of the requirements of the novel as an art form. Moreover, Muwailiḥī's book differed from the two most important ones which preceded it. Ṭahṭāwī's Takhlīṣ al-Ibrīz fī Talkhīṣ Bārīz and Mubārak's ʿAlam al-Dīn, in that the journey - a device used by all three through which they expounded their views - occurred inside Egypt and not outside it. His aim was to reform society and not to exhibit the superiority of Western culture as was the case with his two predecessors. A close link with the maqāma can be discerned in the

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1. Rifāʿa Rafīʿ al-Ṭahṭāwī is considered the first to sow the seeds of the didactic novel with his translation from the French of Télémaque (1699) by Fénelon, Mughāmarāt Talimāk (1867). His own book Takhlīṣ al-Ibrīz fī Talkhīṣ Bārīz (1834) and later Mubārak's ʿAlam al-Dīn can hardly be classified as novels as they totally lack the narrative element. The former is more in the form of reports written by a diligent student to his teacher about his activities in Paris. The latter is a journey made by an Egyptian ʿālim and an Englishman. Their travels and conversations supply necessary information on the differences between conditions in Europe and those in the East. See Badr, op. cit., pp. 52-62.

portrayal of various social aspects of the time. But it differed from the latter in its aim. Muwailiḥī's intention was not to teach the Arabic language,[1] and his attempts to create an inner link, though a weak one, between the chapters of his book was an altogether new phenomenon.[2]

By means of a dream that appears to his narrator, 'Īsā b. Hishām, the experiences of a Pasha of Muḥammad 'Alī's time, who rises from the grave and finds himself in an unfamiliar Cairo, are depicted. This enables the author to compare different aspects of social life past and present without their giving the impression of being unconnected incidents and situations. Throughout al-Muwailiḥī subordinates action and character to his 'reformist' purpose, his style of presentation was a big step towards the novel proper. It is most evident in his power of description and the lively dialogue in simple modern Arabic whereby he attempted to reveal the nature of the various characters.

Another work, in maqāma form, used for social criticism, was Layālī Satīḥ (1907) by Muḥammad Ḥāfiẓ Ibrāhīm (1871-1932). In framework and plan, the work is inferior to Muwailiḥī's. The book consists mainly of separate episodes in which each night a certain problem is discussed between a character accompanying the narrator to Saṭīḥ who remains throughout a mysterious voice. His function is

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1. See Shawqī Ḍaif on the aim of the maqāma, al-Maqāma (Cairo, 1954), p. 9.
2. The maqāmat portray a number of separate situations with no link between them. Badr, op. cit., pp. 70-71.

to analyse the cause of each illness and point out a remedy. The reader is left wondering about the reason for the non-appearance of this figure. No explanation is given. Whereas Muwailiḥī's stage of action was wide enabling his characters to roam about freely among the various social sections, Ḥāfiẓ limits his to the one spot on the bank of the Nile where the discourses take place nightly. This limitation of place greatly influenced the author's narrative method. Instead of depicting social ills through the characters and their behaviour, he relies mainly on indirect reporting. This gives his book the semblance of an article rather than of a novel.

Before studying the emergence and development of the novel proper, special reference must be made to Muṣṭafā Luṭfī al-Manfalūṭī, whose work in the realm of the novel, though mostly in the form of translations, enjoyed great popularity among the educated and uneducated alike during the second decade of the twentieth century and until his death in 1924. His success with the reading public was largely a result of his ability to create an almost new version from a translated work of fiction compatible with the taste of the reader of his age, who liked to indulge in sentimentality and who considered style not so much a means of expressing the writer's feelings and thoughts as a way of adding beauty, sparkle and splendour to what he wrote. And it was al-Manfalūṭī's style that won him his prominent position. It was a mixture of medieval and modern. The smoothness, the imaginative metaphors and similes were all modern. The rhymed prose, which he himself criticized but could

not discard, the balancing of words and phrases by rhyming and unrhymed synonyms, were traditional.

The efforts of the revivalists in attempting to evolve a new type of literary production which would rouse the interest of a wider reading public and appeal to its imagination were not successful. Their failure lay in the medieval view of literature still governing the outlook of the literary circles. Unless a work had a direct moral or educational aim and was written in the classical style, it was not considered literature. As will be seen, this attitude greatly delayed the emergence of the novel as a literary art and later hampered its smooth development.

Two phenomena had a considerable effect on the growth of the novel proper. One was linked with the circumstances surrounding the emergence of the Egyptian middle class, the other with the severance of the link between the cultured Egyptian and his classical heritage and his swing towards Western literature. Since Egypt till the end of the First World War, remained an agricultural country, no radical change took place in Egyptian society as it did in the West where industrialization led to the emergence of a powerful middle class and the breaking up of the old social structure. The Egyptian middle class unlike its European equivalent, grew slowly in general social progress. It did not emerge as a strong force challenging the 'feudal lords' or aristocrats as happened in the West, but rather the newly rich and powerful among them became landlords themselves, joining forces with or replacing the old

Turco-Circassian landlord class. The remainder of that section of society which came to be known as the 'middle class' became entangled in a battle on two fronts: liberation from the power of the large landlords and struggle against British occupation. The pre-occupation of this section with political questions had detrimental effects on both the social and intellectual spheres. Writers from among them tended to serve political rather than literary aims, thus hindering them from the long and mature preparation which is of importance where novel writing is concerned.

The growing national self-consciousness in the second and third decades of the twentieth century led a number of writers to call for the creation of a "national literature" which would express the sentiments and aspirations of the Egyptians in new forms of art such as "the novel, the short story, emotional poetry and drama."[1] Influenced by the 1919 uprising, they tried to establish the Egyptian personality in the literary field at a time when the country was struggling for its independence in the political field. Pioneers such as Maḥmūd Taymūr argued that this could best be achieved by projecting their own personality with all its "Egyptian characteristics" into a framework built on "technical foundations established in Western literature" known as the "story", instead of slavishly imitating bygone forms such as the maqāmat and the rasā'il."[2] These calls can already be clearly discerned in what is now considered the first Egyptian novel in the strict sense

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1. Ḥusain Haykal, Thawrat al-Adab (Cairo, 1948), pp. 9-10.
2. M. Taymūr, a talk published in al-Ādāb, No. 9, September 1960, p. 11.

Zainab by Ḥusain Haykal written as early as 1911. Haykal was unprecedentedly independent of the literary conventions which had till then interfered with the work of those attempting to write fiction. In language, style, subject and treatment, Zainab was a complete break from anything that had preceded it in Arabic literature. Characters, settings and plot are derived from contemporary Egyptian life. The author's nationalist feeling is implicit throughout the whole book. The style is literary but greatly modified in vocabulary and syntax.

The swing of the pioneers towards Western culture in the period between the two World Wars - Haykal's Zainab was an isolated case - influenced to a great degree the growth of the novel proper. Denying any link between their literary heritage and the "novel form" they turned completely to European civilization and literature. Taymūr speaks of the "weakness of the state of the story in Arabic literature".[1] Similarly, Haykal states that what existed in story form in Arabic literature "was trivial and useless for us today".[2] Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm condemns Arabic literature as "a deficiently formed art" which he says "parades only in two well-known gowns: the rasā'il and the maqāmāt." It does not "depict what the people feel or what appeals to their imagination."[3] In the preface to Ṭāhir Lāshīn's novel Ḥawwā' bilā Ādam Ḥasan Maḥmūd writes, that the modern novel is "one of the greatest blessings to

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1. M. Taymūr, Fann al-Qiṣaṣ (Cairo, 1945), p. 40.
2. H. Haykal, op. cit., p. 33.
3. T. al-Ḥakīm, Zahrat al-ʿUmr (Cairo, n.d.), pp. 182-184.

Arabic literature." He sees it as the direct outcome of rejecting the past where "writers aspired only to reach the rank of a classical writer by attempting in vain to imitate him."[1]

The stand of the pioneers was justified by a writer like Aḥmad Ḥasan al-Zayyāt, as natural and sound, because "our classical Arabic literature", he writes, "was not concerned with these forms, so as to set rules for them or produce examples". He also points out that folklore, such as the Thousand and One Nights and the romances, "differs completely" from "stories" in the modern sense, whether in structure, style or aim. He considers this tendency of the authors as benefitting Arabic literature "greatly", completing its deficiency and adding to its wealth.[2]

From the above, it can be safely assumed that between 1918-1939, the novel as a new literary form followed the footsteps of the Western novel. Taymūr, commenting on this fact and its effects writes that "however much it (the novel) retains its independent nature in the future, it will not be safe from the influence of new trends colouring the Western novel in its future development".[3] Makarius in his preface to his Anthologie, observes that the various trends which marked the evolution of European literature through several centuries are telescoped within the works of writers of the same period sometimes even within the works of one writer (dependent on the influences he came under) often jostling and sometimes

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1. Ṭāhir Lāshīn, Ḥawwā' bilā Ādam (Cairo, 1934), p. 13.
2. Aḥmad Ḥasan al-Zayyāt from a talk published in al-Ādāb, Beirut, Year 8, No. 12, December 1960, p. 18.
3. M. Taymūr, Fann al-Qisas, p. 86.

contradicting each other.[1]

The first attempts at creating an indigenous novel met with considerable difficulties. An outstanding obstacle was the unreadiness of the "environment" to accept the production of the pioneers and the lack of contact between it and the authors. The high proportion of illiteracy in the country and the weak educational system, the high cost of publication enabling only a restricted number among the educated of the middle class to buy books, hindered greatly the spread of the pioneers' work in this field. The semi-literate and the uncultured who formed the majority of the reading public preferred the cheaper, translated or imitated novel of entertainment. Moreover, whereas in the West women constituted the larger number of readers in the public for the novel,[2] one cannot speak of a similar situation in Egypt. The weak response was further caused by the political issue which, as mentioned above, preoccupied the country. The depiction of the author's consciousness of his environment or his revelations of the human soul were considered secondary to the attempts of the nation to free itself from foreign occupation.

Nor was the press helpful. It appeared to be wholly absorbed by the political question and popular entertainment.[3]

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1. R. et Laura Makarius, Anthologie de la littérature arabe contempraine (Paris, 1964), p. 40.
2. Ian Watt, The Rise of the Novel, p. 311.
3. 'Īsā 'Ubaid, one of the pioneers, relates how a young writer asked the owner of a weekly paper to have his modern Egyptian stories published gratis. The owner refused on the basis that these stories were too high brow and that he only published detective stories, to satisfy the public. See the introduction to Thurayyā (1922), pp. 3-5.

The literary magazines such as al-Sufūr and al-Fajr al-Jadīd, did not live long because of financial trouble.[1] According to Badr, these two major obstacles confronting the pioneers, the predominance of the political problem and the ignorance and backwardness of the public, presented a contradiction between the aims of the pioneers of the novel proper and the circumstances which social conditions imposed on them. Whereas they wished to project the Egyptian personality and express its actuality, they found themselves isolated from the environment which was not yet prepared to accept their work.[2]

Social factors aside, a main difficulty confronting the early group of Egyptian novel writers was the development of a suitable technique. Apart from Haykal's Zainab earlier productions of any literary value had not presented a realistic portrayal of contemporary social life in a structure, style and vocabulary fitting for the new genre. Having no foundations on which to lean, they were apt, because of their inclination towards Western culture, to adopt the first models they happened to come across and, as in the case of Taymūr, often continued to prefer it to any other.[3]

However no generalisation can be made about the extent and nature of influence of Western culture on these writers, as this

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1. Badr, op. cit., p. 221.
2. Ibid., p. 224.
3. Mahmūd Taymūr came to know Maupassant at an early age by way of his brother Muḥammad, and states his admiration for the French short story writer, declaring that he considers him "the greatest master of the short story". See Fatḥī al-Ibyārī, Taymūr wa Fann al-Uqṣūṣa (Cairo, 1961), p. 45.

was subject to their individual circumstances and the opportunities afforded to each of them. Taymūr, Haykal, al-Ḥakīm and Ṭāhā Ḥusain appear to have been influenced by French literature, whilst Lāshīn's European background was mainly English. But all found a "spiritual nutrition" in Russian literature when they came across it. They were impressed by the profundity of Gogol, Pushkin, Turgeniev, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky and Gorky.[1]

A highly enlightening account of what a novel should present is given by ʿĪsā ʿUbaid in his introduction to his Ihsan Hānim. "Life," he writes, "should be accurately and sincerely depicted." Interesting is his emphasis on the writer's duty to collect notes and documents, in order to enable him to understand human nature and social development, the factors of civilization, environment and heredity. Of great importance is his realization of the significance of analysis, justification of points made and the linking of character with environment. He also stresses the superiority of insinuation and subtle implication in the narrative, to interference and direct comment by the author.[2]

However, neither his work nor that of the rest of the group wholly fulfils the expectations aroused by these statements. Not all those who wrote novels had gifts specially suited for fiction whether among the earlier group or for that matter among the later writers. As for the pioneers they wanted to express themselves in

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1. See Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī, op. cit., pp. 81-82.
2. Quoted by Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī, Ibid., p. 105.

a new form and chose the novel and short story as a vehicle. Despite their desire to adapt the novel to their environment and reflect the latter faithfully, they did not succeed in grasping their "actuality" fully and deeply. The experiences they attempted to express did not wholly originate in their environment, though it was their intention that they should. A great deal of the realistic element in the experiences depicted became confused with experiences and images drawn from their reading and from an environment different and superior to theirs. At times they even imposed these "derived pictures" on to their environment, as in their treatment of woman. Instead of trying to depict woman's backward condition, they expressed their annoyance with a society which did not present them with woman in a more favourable condition as to enable them to write novels in a similar fashion to their Western models in which woman appears unveiled, emancipated, loves with courage and freedom.[1] Taymūr, talking years later about the initial stages of the novel proper, stated that the narrator at the time was most intent on emphasising the local colour, everything that would project the most prominent features of Egyptian society. To achieve the desired effect, he would select well-known Egyptian names, Egyptian places, typical customs, traditions and situations. Having thus prepared the "skeleton" of the narrative, he believed ". . . to have covered all

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1. See Badr, op. cit., pp. 255-226.

the elements of a true Egyptian story".[1] Their superficial awareness of the environment surrounding them inevitably left its mark on the authors' treatment of the action and plot as is evident in most of the novels of that period; this will be seen in the next section and the following chapters. The choice of a local environment was not enough to ensure the success of a novel. The concept of verisimilitude had not been properly assimilated. The authors were driven to depict the environment by nationalistic fervour rather than by a deep awareness of it. Despite vivid descriptions, the result was a not very solid setting and characters were not fully attached to their environment. No ordinary man really emerged. The principal characters were mostly odd or sick. Because the authors were not fully aware of the contemporary social scene, their attempts were constantly "revolving within a narrow framework, that of analysing one of the characters".[2] Taymūr ʿUbaid and Lāshīn tended to analyse a human type from society, whilst al-Ḥakīm and Ṭāhā Ḥusain in particular - both writers who are not mainly novelists - leant towards self-analysis as evident in ʿAudat al-Rūḥ and al-Ayyām respectively.

The pioneers had their own doubts about the value of their work. Their admiration and appreciation of the works of Western writers of fiction led them to compare their first attempts with the product of the Western masters. According to Taymūr, they found a big gap between "the confusion of our pens" and "the novel in

1. Quoted by Ḥaqqī, op. cit., pp. 70-71. Taymūr himself referred to it in a broadcast which was later published in al-Ādāb, Year 8, No. 9, September 1960, p. 11.
2. Badr, op. cit., p. 210.

its true form and correct structure". They recognized after their first experiences that the narrative is "the spirit" before being "a form", "an idea" before being an "event".[1] This stock-taking almost led to a complete loss of self-confidence. The lack of response from the public, the opposition and criticism of the classically educated who condemned them as belonging to "the lowest class of literary writers", lacking literary training and being mere spongers on foreign literatures,[2] aggravated matters. They felt bitter and despondent and wondered whether it was worthwhile to continue along that path. Regrettably ʿĪsā ʿUbaid and Ṭāhir Lāshīn gave up, though the latter in particular, was a promising novelist. His Ḥawwāʾ bilā Ādam as the following chapters will illustrate has considerable depth and shows a true understanding of reality. It can rightly be considered a milestone in the development of the Egyptian novel.

The novel, despite the unappreciative and unwelcoming atmosphere it first encountered and its fairly obvious technical weaknesses, continued slowly but steadily to occupy its place in Egyptian literature. The aims and efforts of the early pioneers were a major contribution to the establishment of this new genre in Arabic literature.

Just as the national awakening in the early decades of the twentieth century led a group of writers to choose the novel as a

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1. Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī, op. cit., pp. 70-71.
2. Zakī Mubārak, "Ḥayātuna al-Adabiyya" in al-Maʿrifa. Quoted by Gibb, "Studies in Contemporary Arabic Literature", B.S.O.A.S., vol. VII, part I, p. 14.

vehicle for projecting the Egyptian image, so did the growing awareness of the public of the problems besetting the country find an echo in the novels written during the forties and fifties of that century by a second group of writers. After the Second World War society was in a state of growing unrest. The young and educated became more and more politically and socially conscious and literature gave voice to this new awareness. Conditions among rural and urban masses were appalling; political struggles were endless; philanthropic schemes were in the air, but their tendency to remain there filled the poor and the educated among the masses with resentment. Certain writers shared this concern with the condition of Egypt and took it upon themselves to portray it in novel form.[1]

In Ard al-Nifāq, Yūsuf al-Sibāʿī exposes the whole corrupt system. And in al-Saqqā Māt, the lives and hardships of the urban poor are realistically depicted. Najīb Maḥfūẓ portrays the frustration and despair of the petty bourgeois, the discrimination between the high and the low and the privileges enjoyed by the former in seven of his novels written during that period. Iḥsān ʿAbd al-Quddūs in Anā Ḥurra and Laṭīfa al-Zayyāt in al-Bāb al-Maftūḥ both consider the position of woman in a conventional society and treat the subject with greater frankness and understanding than was common before. Ḥaqqī in Qindīl Umm Hāshim presents the clash of two different cultures in one individual. The themes of fate

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1. Makarius, op. cit., p. 44.

and ignorance, antiquated methods and traditions, are dealt with once again in his second novel Sahh al-Nawm. Tāhā Ḥusain of the earlier group presents in this period two novels in which he condemns ignorance and exposes the shuyūkh al-ṭuruq as in Shajarat al-Bu's. And in Du'ā' al-Karawān attacks meaningless customs. With the change of régime in 1952 the conditions of the peasant masses was brought to the fore. Three novels dealing with the peasants with greater realism than ever before appeared in the fifties, al-Arḍ (1954) by 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sharqāwī, Ahlan wa Sahlan (1958) by Ḥusain Mu'nis and al-Ḥarām (1959) by Yūsuf Idrīs.

Our field of interest is limited mainly to this group of post War II writers in whose novels the organisation and condition of society is revealed with greater realism. Among the earlier group Haykal's Zainab (1914), al-Ḥakīm's 'Audat al-Rūḥ (1927), Lāshīn's Ḥawwā'bilā Ādam (1934) and Ṭāhā Ḥusain's al-Ayyām (1929) will also be considered as they reveal social attitudes, and manners of society in detail.[1]

That the post World War II fiction, that is the novel written mainly by the second generation of writers has inherited a number of earlier novel's characteristics is obvious. That the best writers among them by virtue of the difficulties encountered by the pioneers, have a greater awareness of reality is true. The contemporary scene is more realistically reflected by Maḥfūẓ, al-Sharqāwī, Idrīs, Ḥusain

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1. Reasons for the type of novel to be considered have already been given in the introduction. See Introduction, p. 13.

Mu'nis, Iḥsān ʿAbd al-Quddūs and Laṭīfa al-Zayyāt. Characters on the whole are related more satisfactorily to their environment than is the case with previous fictional characters. A few among them reveal themselves through movement and dialogue and are made more live because of vivid individualistic touches. Their speech and behaviour belong to them alone and not to the type. The tendency to give a full preparatory study of the character is still common among the novelists and is often encountered in Maḥfūẓ's earlier novels. This weakness is particularly obvious with female characters. Women, in spite of the supposed increase in their freedom and education, appear mostly in the traditional role. Muḥammad ʿAbdallah 'Inān's statement made in 1930 that the key to the development of the novel "lies in the social position of women"[1] still holds true. A deeper understanding of woman and her emotions, than most appear to possess, would be required to create a truly convincing female character. One of the chief difficulties a novel writer meets with when describing or analysing his characters at length is to make the characters' sayings and doings consistent with what he told the reader about them at the start. Lāshīn among the pioneers succeeds remarkably well in the dramatic method. Maḥfūẓ's desire to get closer to the environment and the 'mind' of his characters has led to a considerable improvement in the technique of the novel. Internal monologue is used to a greater extent and coincidences, though still affecting the course of events in the majority of the novels, are far less

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1. M.ʿA. ʿInān, al-Siyāsa, 1 March 1930, p. 10.

in evidence than in earlier writings. But both earlier and later novels are on the whole limited in their range of scenes, characters and moods. Sex and religion are handled very traditionally with one or two exceptions. A better sense of form can be detected in the second group. Their books no longer include a huge mass of extraneous matter as is to be found in al-Ḥakīm's 'Audat al-Rūḥ or Haykal's Zainab. And though Maḥfūẓ's novels, the trilogy in particular, are often full of detailed description, the material is not distracting or oppressive. In many scenes, it adds a new dimension to the presentation of reality. Rarer, too, is the intrusion of the author whether he is putting his characters aside for a moment and addressing the reader directly or his comments on characters or events.

The choice of language to be used in the dialogue, which proved to be one of the most controversial issues, has been overcome to a great extent, by the more talented among the novel writers. Maḥfūẓ's characters use idiomatic Arabic and the conversation flows freely and naturally. Al-Sharqāwī's peasants speak in the local dialect, correctly and accurately, which gives an impression of vitality and earthiness.

Whenever an author is intent on expressing his own opinion on a subject, the question of the compatibility between the expression of his message and the artistic form of his work is apt to arise. For, if the work is to be wholly successful, a delicate balance must be maintained between the 'didactic' message and

aesthetic considerations. However, such purely literary questions are of no concern for this study. In the following chapters the selected novels will be examined to discover the extent to which the authors revealed the social problems besetting their country and how they depicted and dealt with them.

PART II

THE NOVELISTS

Muhammad Husain Haykal (1889-1956)

When M. Husain Haykal published his novel Zainab, in 1914, the fact that it was a novel was deliberately left out. Instead, the work was presented as "rural scenes and morals" by "an Egyptian, a peasant." The subtitle and designation are of considerable significance. They reflect the growing nationalistic feeling among the educated groups and the importance attached to being an Egyptian. Important also, was Haykal's refusal to refer to his work as a novel. It reflects the attitude of the educated in general towards this form of literature, as it existed at the time. Not only did Haykal regard his attempt as a more serious literary work than the various translated, adapted or imitated prose fiction available then, but he feared the ill-consequences of "being known as a story writer on the name of the lawyer."[1] The notion of the novel as a literary form having something to do with art in the sense of being consciously made and shaped to an aesthetic end was new.

Thus, Zainab made its way into Arabic literature in a most unobtrusive way. Judged in retrospect it cannot be denied that it is the starting point of the Egyptian novel. As mentioned earlier

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1. M. Husain Haykal, Zainab (Cairo, 1963), p. 7.

it broke completely with all that had been written before it. Zaydān's historical novels and Farah Antōn's 'philosophical' novels were more in the nature of 'romances' abounding in dangers through which the heroes pass successfully and ending the narrative with the happy union of the lovers. With Zainab reality entered into Egyptian fiction. It was clear, here, that an impression of actuality was being conveyed to the reader. The social life of the Delta is portrayed in a series of episodes centered on Zainab, the beautiful peasant girl. In essence, the story of Zainab is the story of ill-fated lovers but Haykal's originality lies in recognizing the incalculable influence of environment on the characters. His attempts at linking the characters' actions and final tragedy with causes originating in the social habits and customs of the people indicated a new approach. The psychological analysis of his characters and the many descriptions of natural scenery - though often distracting and wearisome - add to the general sense of realism the book conveys.

It is interesting to note the motives that led Haykal to write in this literary form, before discussing any further the merits or defects of the story he wrote. Haykal like many of his contemporaries of the rising middle class was conscious of the national spirit spreading throughout the educated group amongst them, with its motto "Egypt for the Egyptians".[1] His pride in his nationality was reflected in the designation he gave to himself as mentioned above. The word fallāh was used in defiance

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1. See Chapter 1, p. 33.

of the hitherto ruling Turkish class which looked down with contempt on all peasants. Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī in Fajr al-Qiṣṣa al-Miṣriyya, stresses the fact that Haykal's consciousness of his country was largely due to Aḥmad Luṭfī al-Sayyid's influence on him at home and abroad.[1] Haykal himself describes this influence as "an eye opener." He acknowledges the debt he owes Luṭfī al-Sayyid in enriching his experience and knowledge of the Egyptian countryside in particular,[2] for "I was able during my study leave to witness the life of our countryside more than I did before."[3] He relates how Luṭfī al-Sayyid being a member of the governorate council of Daqahliyya, had asked him to accompany him on his rounds in the towns and villages of the province to see the state of primary education there.

> "We used to meet every morning at the nearest village on the way to the kuttābs of the other villages, which Luṭfī wished to see . . .. We did not return until late in the evening, nay, at midnight sometimes. We did this for about two weeks. I admit that what I saw of the conditions of the countryside pained me."[4]

However, Haykal's love for and interest in his country were already reflected in Zainab which he wrote between April 1910 and March 1911,[5] a few months before he went on the above visit. His nationalist feeling is expressed in his dedication in the second edition: "To you Egypt . . . I present this novel and for you have

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1. Ḥaqqī, op. cit., pp. 38-39.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p. 39.
4. Ibid.
5. Haykal, Zainab, p. 7.

I written it . . . ."[1] From the numerous and lengthy descriptive passages in Zainab, it is evident that Haykal, overcome by homesickness, whilst studying in Paris, set out to recall "what I left behind in Egypt."[2] The beautiful landscape of Switzerland in particular increased his nostalgia for the Egyptian countryside which distance and loneliness transformed in the mind of the author into something as beautiful as what he was contemplating. What is noteworthy, nevertheless, is the fact that his 'love of Egypt' did not blind him to the all pervading ignorance and backwardness of the people. Having been given the opportunity to live and study in an advanced country (France) he could see for himself the immense gap in culture and way of life.

Indeed, French thought and French literature had exercised a powerful attraction for him. He makes no secret of his admiration of French literature: its lucidity, ease and flow, its accuracy of expression and description, its simplicity of style, which is the mark, he declares, of those who are interested in what they wish to express more than in the expression itself. And he states that "my admiration for this new literature is mixed with my longing for my country . . . ."[3] Rousseau had a special attraction for him, and he believed deeply that literature should not be separate from the sciences and philosophy. Accordingly he sees "literature as a beautiful art, which should aim at informing the people by means of words

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1. Ibid., p. 5.
2. Ḥaqqī, op. cit., p. 40.
3. Ibid., p. 42.

of all that is beautiful and true in life."[1] Haykal sees the writer as the man who ought to realize that message, and states emphatically that this can only be achieved through "science and philosophy". Therefore he points out that it is incumbent on the one who wishes to become a real writer, to know well the literature of his own language[2] and at the same time to be well read in the philosophies and literatures of various other languages of his age.[3]

"Zainab", writes Ḥaqqī, "is the fruit of reading Paul Bourget[4] and Henri Bordeaux."[5] Their influence is evident in the way the narrative drags, in the small interest shown in dialogue, and in the theme of the human heart as it beats, in the amorous entanglements, the moral problems and the social dilemmas. Moreover through French literature it was borne in on him that the Arabic language had to be disciplined into a flexible idiom, if thoughts, ideals, and delicate shades of meaning were to be expressed simply and accurately. His aim was to convey his feelings and thoughts in as simple, direct and expressive a way as possible. In view of the literary style then dominant and the prevalent attitude of the revivalists, it is remarkable how successful he was in putting into practice in his first literary effort, Zainab, his call for the simplification of style and vocabulary. Moreover, with the literary form he chose he was faced with the question of

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1. Haykal, Thawrat al-Adab, p. 25.
2. Haykal, Fī Auqāt al-Farāgh (Cairo, n.d.), p. 101.
3. Ibid., pp. 372-4.
4. One of the most gifted and popular of the numerous psychological novelists. A Short History of French Literature, Geoffrey Brereton (6 ed. London, 1968), p. 233.
5. Ḥaqqī, op. cit., p. 42.

the idiom to be used in the dialogue. His decision to let the peasants converse in the colloquial dialect was bold. It gave the novel a realistic touch created by the simplicity of the expression.

The plot on the whole, is thin. But the social criticism forms an integral part of the plot and the lavish descriptions of nature give the novel its aesthetic appeal and informative value. The intrusion of the author whether in supplying psychological comment or in the descriptions, weakens the structure of the novel and is one of its defects. However, the lyrical quality of some of the descriptive passages compensated for the technical defect. The social theme and message is on the whole handled skilfully. The author denounces "outworn customs and traditions" through Ḥāmid an educated youth, the son of the village landlord. Various social problems such as the organization of the family and the seclusion of women, the question of education and its divorce from the realities of life, the ignorance of the peasants and the parasitical nature of the shaikhs of the turuq are presented mainly through Ḥāmid's eyes. The author's love for his country is subtly woven into the fabric of the whole narrative. Only on the question of military service under the control of a foreigner does his nationalist feeling find direct expression.[1]

Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī sees that Zainab's place in Arabic literature stems, not only from it being the first novel in "our modern literature", but that it is "the best novel describing the countryside

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1. Haykal, Zainab, pp. 232-236.

comprehensively."[1] He regrets that later writers followed Haykal slavishly, scarcely adding anything new; a highly complimentary view of "the young man who was ploughing virgin land".[2] "For the story of Zainab", writes Ḥaqqī, "makes you live with it in the country, inhaling the smell of its people, its land, its beasts and its plants." It makes you know all the inhabitants of the village well; the rich landowner amongst his children, his nightly walks with his women folk, the way he waits for the newspaper and lies down; the wage earning labourers, the difficulties they have in getting their wages from the official, their life in their houses and fields and the life of their women and children; the scene of the crops and the gathering in the evenings round the waterwheel; the marriage celebrations and the dhikr circles, the going on pilgrimage or the drafting into the army and the journey to the Sudan; the worry of the indebted peasant and his incessant toil in order to free himself from the yoke and the shame of that debt, and how the life of the whole village is linked with what the land grows, cotton in particular.[3]

All these aspects of village life presented in Zainab are covered with a film of lyricism, which despite its aesthetic appeal, deprives reality of its harsher glare and leaves the reader with the impression that the villagers are happy and content with their lives.

But the various defects of the novel are of little importance

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1. Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī, op. cit., p. 46.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., pp. 46-47.

if compared with the effort made to write in this new genre. The fact that the personal element tends to predominate over the narrative, that characterization is not complex enough, that realism is tinged with romanticism and that the story is simple, does not deprive Zainab of the credit of being the first Egyptian novel in which characters and scenery were all based on contemporary Egyptian life.

Maḥmud Ṭāhir Lāshīn (1897-1955)

When measured against the attempts of his contemporaries, men no less interested than he was in the new genre, Hawwā' bilā Ādam (1934) by Ṭāhir Lāshīn represented a decisive step in the development of the Egyptian novel. With Lāshīn the novel no longer consisted of merely a number of episodes and situations in the life of an abnormal character, thus giving the author a good opportunity to exhibit his ability at analysis. Instead it became an "expression of a situation and the writer's reaction to contemporary life".[1] His clear and definite attitude towards aspects of contemporary life confronting him led him to write a more tightly knit novel than ever before. Through him the novel acquired an axis round which events revolved and which linked the various episodes. Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī in an article on the merits of Taymūr and Lāshīn as short story writers points out the latter's superiority in plot. "Lāshīn," he writes, "is distinguished by a well knit plot, his story has clear features . . ., moreover the events transfer you from idea to idea in a European literary fashion."[2] Ḥaqqī's observation in relation to the short story bears him out also in the case of the writer's novel. While the titles of both Taymūr and ʿĪsā ʿUbaid's novels indicate the name of a person, Lāshīn's title denotes a specific situation, that of 'Eve without Adam'.

Lāshīn was the first to express the plight of the educated among the petty bourgeoisie and their sense of loss so accurately

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1. A. Badr, op. cit., p. 260.
2. Ḥaqqī, Khaṭawāt fī al-Naqd (Cairo, 1961), p. 12.

within the narrative framework. His grasp of this social reality was a major step in the development of the novel. It no longer meant a record of contemporary life, where characters and places were given local names, and then considered sufficient to represent the local atmosphere, as is evident in many of Taymūr's and 'Ubaid's works at the time. Lāshīn attempted in his novel to express his awareness of actuality and his attitude towards it. Whereas his contemporaries were interested mainly in projecting the Egyptian personality and describing the environment, his aim was far more social. He was intent on bringing to light certain problems of the people and weaving them into narrative form. Dominant in Ḥawwā' bilā Ādam is the theme of despair and frustration of the educated group among the lower middle class. The conflict between their desire to get rid of customs and traditions that bind them to their own environment and their wish to realize their aspirations and improve their conditions, which are hindered by the power and authority of the upper class, is successfully portrayed. It does not escape the notice of the writer that the privileged class is not averse to showing sympathy and interest on occasions to the lower middle class, so long as it plays the role of the follower. This will be illustrated in greater detail in the following chapter.

By letting his heroine Ḥawwā' be unjustly deprived of her scholarship which would have furthered her chances of progress, Lāshīn portrays the helplessness and frustration of this class, despite their struggle to assert themselves. Ḥawwā''s cry against such unfair treatment by those wielding the power is the cry of

thousands of similar cases.

Comparing Lāshīn with his contemporaries ʿUbaid, Taymūr, al-Ḥakīm, al-Māzinī, one is surprised at the difference in the degree of awareness that distinguished him from them. An awareness which resulted in considerable artistic maturity evident in the novel. In the present writer's opinion the difference stems from the author's deep interest in life around him and the pains he took to get first hand knowledge of what he was going to write about. It was his approach which singled him out from among other writers. According to Ḥaqqī, Lāshīn used to "think a great deal" about an incident or problem he had chosen, turn it inside out, and arrange it slowly, then narrate it in an easy and compact fashion to his friends. Later he would sit and write it out with patience and absorption.[1] This patience, careful selection, the seriousness of aim and the interest he took in his work, isolate Lāshīn from the rest. Moreover most of what he wrote was the outcome of his knowledge, personal experience and observations. He would spend a whole day in court[2] to experience the right atmosphere, in order to give an accurate picture of the proceedings of a case as illustrated in his short story Bait al-Tāʿa.

There is no doubt that his personal circumstances helped to a certain degree to increase his knowledge and enrich his experience. Though belonging to the Turco-Circassian élite, Lāshīn had to work for his living. Unlike Taymūr, well off but for health reasons

1. Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī, Fajr al-Qissa al Miṣriyya, pp. 84-85.
2. Ibid., p. 85.

confined to the house and a limited world, Lāshīn's post as an architect took him to various popular quarters and places and brought him into direct contact with the people. He mixed with a great variety of awlād al-balad in coffee houses and the shops of small traders and thus came to know well their conditions, their problems, their joys and griefs. Thus his novel has the advantage over others in being written by an author who, although not born of the class from which his heroine stems, has fully associated with them, so that he is well aware of their aspirations. At the same time he maintains a certain element of the upper class inheritance which helps him to see social conditions in their truer perspective than many bourgeois or petty bourgeois writers, whose view is generally limited and lacking in depth. Moreover he had the advantage of a better cultural background than many a bourgeois writer which enabled him to express himself more easily and adequately. He was also a great admirer of English and Russian novelists. Chekov and Dickens were among his favourite writers. The latter in particular had made a considerable impact on him. an impact which may be detected in Lāshīn's profound interest in social questions.

Lāshīn's artistic maturity can be clearly discerned in the portrayal of Ḥawwā', the heroine of his novel. Far from being an abnormal character as met with in Taymūr's al-Shaikh Sayyid al-'Abīt and Rajab Afandī, or in 'Ubaid's Thurayyā, Ḥawwā' is a well-balanced educated young woman. She is an intelligent, sensitive and profound study of the human being who struggles hard against a variety of

odds in order to establish for herself an honourable place in her society. She is in conflict with the ignorance dominant in her environment and the unlimited prerogatives of the upper classes. Even her death at the end of the story is not a mere device introduced by the author for the sake of convenience. It is the natural outcome of a number of incidents that have affected her in the course of the narrative. Moreover it signifies the dilemma of the educated among her class. For while the poor and ignorant are content with their lot, and the upper class, are happy with the power they excercise they, the lower middle class, live on the edge of two worlds belonging to neither. Still weak, the blows they receive are too heavy for a group that has hardly emerged. Their resistance fails as they see no glimmer of hope. It is to Lāshīn's credit that he could so successfully capture the feelings, aspirations and stand of the petty bourgeois through Ḥawwā' without sacrificing her individuality. The impression of hopelessness at the end may have been the result of the disillusionment that swept over the middle classes after 1923 and which the author seems to have experienced. It is not surprising that Ḥawwā' bilā Ādam was Lāshīn's last contribution to the world of letters. The despair that engulfed his heroine after her brave struggle must have settled on his soul too and filled him with doubt of ever being able to change or achieve anything while the existing order lasted.

The theme of the novel, though mainly serious, does not become oppressive, for seriousness is broken from time to time by humorous incidents and characters. People like Najiyya the servant

girl, Shaikh Muṣṭafā, the owner of a shop that "sells all articles of magic", and Ḥawwā's grandmother, pathetic in her serious belief in and pursuit of the supernatural, and the incredible ignorance of all, serve to create humour. Above all are the author's comments, frequently coloured by subtle humour, for Lāshīn was a man aware of the disparities in life who could laugh at himself and them.

His use of dialogue is outstanding. It is precise, vivid and realistic, a great asset to his characterization. Dialogue is not simply used, as still often is at present, to transmit a piece of news, or to deliver opinions out of the blue, but through it a clearer picture of the inner self of the character is revealed. The dialogue between Ḥawwā' and Ramzī on their way to her home[1] is one of the most artistically handled in modern Egyptian fiction. It cleverly reflects the contradiction between what a character actually says and his inner preoccupation with matters remote from the topic of conversation.

The success of the narrative stems not only from the authentic atmosphere of the two classes portrayed, the firm structure and the gradual and convincing interaction of characters, but also from the principal method of presentation, that of contrast. The author makes use of contrast to heighten his meaning and direct the reader's attention to the main themes. There are pairs of contrasting scenes as thos illustrating Ḥawwā''s and Ramzī's places of residence. Here the inhabitants enjoy all that wealth and postion can offer

and social occasions are distinguished by elegance and refinement. And there stands Ḥawwā''s house, small, insignificant, its residents simple, clumsy and crude.

The novel has nothing of the rambling or discursive nature of Zainab or ʿAudat al-Rūḥ. But it is not altogether free from defects. Though Lāshīn succeeded to a great degree in letting his characters declare themselves in action and dialogue, he resorted especially in the first two chapters to the direct reporting method, presenting a detailed study of Ḥawwā''s environment, general and private. On one or two occasions there is a slight indication that the author may have used his heroine as his mouthpiece, expressing through her his opinions, as when she delivers a talk on the contemporary problems of education. Minor characters are not given the same care by the author as the principals. Nevertheless, they emerge convincingly enough through a few bold strokes which emphasise specific traits. However, these are minor blemishes in no way detracting from the general value of the novel which as mentioned above was a significant step in the development of the Egyptian novel and which reveals a talent that promised a great deal had it continued to devote itself to novel writing.

Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm (1898[1]-)

A brief summary of the more important biographical details about Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm will be useful here as they are reflected to a considerable extent in the works relevant to this study.

Tawfīq al-Ḥakim spent his boyhood in Damanhur. His father was a landowner of peasant stock whose comparative wealth helped him to marry a girl of Turkish descent. Proud of her origin, she did her best to sever her husband's connections with his peasant relatives. Being the dominant person in the house, she had the say in Tawfīq's upbringing. Her strong sense of class, discouraged her son from forming any friendship with the pupils of the lower classes during his elementary school days. She showed even greater reluctance to let him go to Cairo and live with his paternal uncles while attending the secondary school there.

Staying with his uncles in the popular quarter of al-Sayyida Zainab, he saw the contrast between his father's background and his mother's, and became aware of the restrictions his mother had imposed upon him and resented them. He enjoyed the gay and informal life with his uncles despite their comparative poverty. It was there that he tried to throw off the bonds which had been restricting him at home. Through his uncles he discovered his love for his country and its people and with them he joined in the activities of the uprising of 1919. They were imprisoned for a short period before his father used his influence to have them released.

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1. According to some he was born in 1902. See Ismāʿīl Adham, Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm, p. 64.

After obtaining his law degree in 1925, he went to Paris at the insistence of his father to get his doctorate. However, the city of art, music, intellectual activity and literature was too tempting for a young man whose heart had never been in the legal studies. Neglecting the course for which he had been sent he began to pursue his real interest, that of becoming an artist. He saw his ultimate goal in realizing this ambition. "How often have I resisted and struggled to free myself from all that which distracts me from art... ." When he finally achieved his aim he wrote: "Here I am victorious today ... yes I have won ... now I am for art only."[1]

So strong was his desire to belong to a group of artists that while in Paris he "affected their attire."[2] Interesting is al-Ḥakīm's reaction to the intellectual world that opened up in front of him in France. In his thirst for knowledge he spent much of his time in Paris as he later described, "bent over a desk reading and reading, until I read everything. I have not left anything of the history of intellectual activity which I have not perused."[3] The products of the human mind across the centuries filled him with bewilderment and awe. "Reading,' he wrote, 'opened in front of me worlds beyond my capacity and vistas with unlimited boundaries. It happened suddenly, or at least at a speed which my brain could not stand. It became like a fly let loose in the vast

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1. Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm, Zahrat al-'Umr, p.13.
2. Ibid., p.90.
3. Ibid., p.157.

emptiness after having only flown around in the limited atmosphere of a room and known light only through a closed glass window... ."[1]

Even his views of love and woman were governed by his obsession with becoming an artist. He wanted to experience great passions as great artists do. But his concept of love was in the true oriental fashion where man assumes that he himself is the beloved, irrespective of his own preparedness for 'giving' in return. "If only destiny had granted me this blessing for one moment," he wrote, "and made me find someone who would love me truly once."[2] He did in fact try to form a sort of relationship with a European girl. However, it came to nothing, because the girl could not understand his complicated eastern ways in pursuing her.[3]

Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm was in a dilemma concerning the form of literature he should pursue. After attempting to write poetry, then prose in novel form, he finally settled for drama. The reason for his choice he stated in a letter to a French friend. He found drama of a more"compact structure than the novel."[4] The question of art for al-Ḥakīm remained a question of form, not a study of people and their interrelationships. His judgements on art were delivered from this standpoint. His interest in dialogue he refers to a love of "strong structure." " ... I am an architect of letters,' he wrote, '... of the type who builds a naked temple, symmetrical

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1. Ibid., pp.156-157
2. Ibid., p. 49.
3. Ibid., p. 44.
4. Ibid., p.82.

pillars and nothing else."[1] His preference for French belles lettres over English and Russian literature, despite the depth and analytical approach of the latter in particular, results from the same outlook. The French novel according to him represents that "form" in its charming beauty; the literature of noble elegant conversation, calm and clear thinking.[2]

Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm is considered primarily as Egypt's leading playwright. However he attempted novel writing, and his first effort, also his major one in this field, was 'Audat al-Rūḥ. He wrote it in Paris in 1927 but it was not published until 1933 in Cairo. Much of the material in 'Audat al-Rūḥ and in his later work Yawmiyyāt Nā'ib fī al-Aryāf which took the form of a diary, is drawn from his own life. In the former he depicts his boyhood and youth, whilst the Yawmiyyāt reflect his life and work as a prosecutor.

In 'Audat al-Rūḥ al-Ḥakīm portrays a section of Egyptian society at the time of the 1919 uprising. But the emphasis is not on the political roots of the struggle but the social environment of the people who rose against the foreign occupier. The title of the novel indicates al-Ḥakīm's main theme, that of the 'Return of the Soul'. It is based on the Pharaonic myth appearing in the Book of the Dead, which tells of the murder of the god Osiris and the long journeys his sister undertook to gather his dismembered body. And how finally she bent over the parts calling his soul, in the hope of it returning to the corpse, and thus be resurrected.[3]

1. Ibid., p. 82.
2. Ibid., p. 105.
3. Ḥaqqī, Fajr al-Qissa al-Misriyya, p.132.

To al-Ḥakīm contemporary occupied Egypt resembled a dismembered body, whilst the national uprising in 1919 was the spark which signified the "return of the soul". The author attempted to represent the intended meaning of the book through the goings and comings of a typical lower middle class Egyptian family, whose members consisted of a schoolboy, a serious student, a teacher, a suspended officer, a middle-aged housekeeper and a servant. A warm relationship joins all members of the family. But this harmony is disrupted by the appearance of a young girl, Saniyya, their neighbour, in their lives. All male members fall in love with her, each in his own peculiar way. The pursuit of their individual interest would have almost wrecked the once perfect atmosphere, were it not for the uprising which engulfs them all and transforms their infatuation into a great love for a greater goal, that of Egypt, their country.

The message of the novel is noble but the presentation is unworthy. The weakness arises from the lack of balance between what the author intended the story to represent, evident in the title and the adaptation of the old Egyptian myth, and the actual incidents inserted into the narrative, which are of relatively little value. This weakness is apparent particularly at the end, when the author's aim of "joining body and soul" in their act of resurrection fails. The failure to present his theme forcefully and convincingly through the characters and events he depicts stems from the author's

own conception of the history of Egypt and his conception of the novel.[1] He sees Egypt maintaining its eternal and fixed character of "grandeur" throughout the ages and considers all the apparent aspects of backwardness and misery of the peasants as merely a thin upper layer, concealing the true and marvellous essence. This "spiritual strength" scattered in the disjointed body he conceives as only awaiting the "worshipped one"[2] who will gather its parts and direct it to the real goal, i.e., bring the miracle about which, according to the author, is represented by the 1919 uprising.

In order to express this idea he imposes on his characters a unity which fails to convince the reader that it is genuine. Muḥsin, the nephew, for no apparent reason, refers to his relatives as "al-shaʿb" (the people), and throughout the novel the implication is that they represent the people. To emphasise this arbitrary unity the author imposes on the characters concerned a number of similar feelings and experiences. They all become ill for instance at one and the same time and suffer from the same illness. They all sleep in one and the same room, eat together of the same food and use the same wardrobe for their clothes.[3] They all fall in love with the

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1. "The difference between Adab and the story," he wrote in 1948, is like the difference between the higher and lower spheres of man's activities. If the story depicts man in life, Adab depicts the intellect in the life of man. For man is not only a being moving in a material environment, rural or urban, house, cafe or place of work, what the story writers tend to call realism, but he is also and above all a mind roving in the high realms of thought, a spirit floating in sublime poetic meanings. To care for this upper part of man is of the specialization of Adab." Akhbār al-yawm, 27 March 1948.
2. T. al-Ḥakīm, ʿAudat al-Rūḥ (Cairo, n.d., 2vols.), vol.II, pp. 62-64.
3. Ibid., vol. I, pp. 9-10, 26.

same girl, all are unsuccessful in gaining her love. All take part in the uprising, all are imprisoned and later all are moved to the prison hospital. The novel ends with the same doctor who attended them at the beginning expressing his surprise at finding them all again in one room at the hospital. "Is it you? Even here you are one next to the other, the one beside his brother !"[1]

Al-Ḥakīm attempted to give the ordinary, the simple and the naive in the life of his characters a depth of meaning which the dramatization both of characters and incidents is too thin to bear. The contradiction between the behaviour of his character and the interpretation imposed by the author is a major defect of the work. For while the ordinary aspect of their behaviour is given a deep meaning which apparently only the author detects we feel that the characters' behaviour only evokes laughter or a smile. It has nothing of the sublime in it that is compatible with the intended theme. As this behaviour does not reveal the author's thoughts he feels it incumbent on him to interfere and explain the meaning hidden behind the simple and ordinary actions and appearances in order to convince the reader that they express unity, greatness of heart and firm attachment to "the worshipped" one.[2] For until the end the sha'b are preoccupied by the trivialities of life and have not shown any interest in the condition of Egypt. We do not feel that their taking part in the uprising is the natural outcome of a growth or development in their character or an understanding of the political

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1. Ibid., vol. II, p.262.
2. Ibid., vol. II, p.240.

situation of the country. The whole event does not occupy more than a few pages (20) of a novel of 543 pages. As it happens the suddenness appears to have taken the author himself by surprise. Thus it is represented as a miracle, the manifestation of the hidden powers of a people who in days past performed the "miracle of the pyramids", and not as the result of various grievances. The author's enforced explanation is carried even further when he indicates that those taking part in the uprising do not know that this passion which "erupted in their hearts" did so at one and the same time... because they are all the sons of Egypt, the sons of one heart."[1] Another weakness that detracts from the authenticity of the report is that all the characters are allowed to emerge from the struggle alive and unscathed.

Despite the 'grandeur' of the theme the novel is limited in scope. Action takes place in the sha'b's flat, in the house of their neighbours and the café below. The reader is not taken outside the confines of the popular al-Sayyida quarter. When Muḥsin goes home on holiday, a glimpse of the countryside is given. Though the author makes great use of dialogue it does not always advance the plot; much of what is said is trivial and irrelevant either to the narrative or to the revelation of character though it is at times very funny. The novel is also not altogether free from an autobiographical aspect. The author narrates directly incidents in his own life. For instance he interrupts the conversation between Muḥsin and Saniyya to give a lengthy recollection of his childhood

1. Ibid., vol. II, p.242.

and his relationship with one of the 'awālim who used to visit and entertain his family. What he relates is interesting and informative but weakens the construction of the novel as it is superfluous material adding nothing to the narrative.

However, the readability of the novel, rambling and superficial in characterization as it is, lies in the individual scenes many of which are delightfully amusing rather than in the work as a whole. The life and goings on in the small café; Zannuba's frantic attempts to secure a husband; the adventures of the military doctor in the Sudan; life on an estate where Muhsin goes to spend his holidays; the world of the 'awālim through the eyes of the young Muḥsin who used to accompany them; the tricks resorted to by both sexes in order to contact the other in a segregated society; the attitude of the Turkish upper class towards the indigenous people of the country exemplified by Muḥsin's mother and Muḥsin's romantic love for Sanniyya, are all presented with gusto and sympathy and give the novel the appeal it has for the ordinary reader.

Yawmiyyāt Nā'ib fī al-Aryāf, his second book relevant to this study, reflects as its title indicates incidents and happenings in the life of a prosecutor in a rural area. Technically, the work is not an advance on his first attempt, 'Audat al-Rūḥ. Its importance lies in the vivid picture it exhibits of the judicial and administrative aspects of rural Egypt. Drawing on his life when occupying the post of a prosecutor (after his reluctant return from France)[1] he reveals the workings of the

1. T. al-Ḥakīm, Zahrat al-'Umr, pp. 202-203.

administration in the countryside and the follies of the penal system that is based upon false principles. He portrays the complete dichotomy between the backward and ignorant peasant in the countryside and the governing body with its imported law, whose rigid and alien texts are mechanically applied by those representing the government; the prosecutor, the ma'mūr and the judge. Al-Ḥakīm focuses the attention of the reader on the shortcomings of the law, and its method of application, indicating that emphasis is on the letter and not the spirit of the law. The peasant is therefore incapable of accepting or understanding it and adheres to the law the village has made for itself. The dichotomy is further aggravated by the corruption of the administration which is keen to adhere to formalities and to submit to the executive power in its persecution of the peasant, acting consistently from self-interest alone.

The form of a diary has been cleverly used. Through it the author expresses his thoughts in connection with the incidents he encounters on his daily and nightly tours and the cases with which he deals. By presenting the story of Rīm, the beautiful peasant girl, and linking her with the strange character of Shaikh 'Aṣfūr, the author strengthens the structure of the book. Rīm's case does not however develop properly throughout the book. It remains rather one of the many loosely linked episodes of the novel. The stamp of a diary is evident in the digressions in which the author describes his personal worries and the demands of work or touches upon topics which appear to him of special interest at the time. The end is

left loose. The reader is left with the impression that new portraits and new daily entries could be added.

Here as in ʿAudat al-Rūḥ al-Ḥakīm's humour is predominant. The characters, the language put into their mouths, their behaviour and the situations in which they find themselves are often very funny.

Ṭāhā Ḥusain (1889-)

Ṭāhā Ḥusain is not primarily a novelist. His contribution to literature is extensive. A number of his books are scholarly in nature and have an educational aim. Yet part of his work consists of stories, a few of which are certainly novels and in spite of the difficulty of classification, al-Ayyām is to be placed in the same category. It cannot be classified simply as an autobiography, for it does not adhere to all the rules of this form of literature. Above all, it has an essential characteristic of the novel: the inner link between the various happenings, exemplified in the author's growing awareness which is itself projected through the development of events. The selection of specific situations and scenes, illustrating the author's deprivation in childhood and youth render the book close to a novel. The autobiographical element, with comments and analysis by the author, dominates the book on occasions. And when the author leaves the "boy" for a while and concentrates on depicting the environment, the book becomes a sociological study of the backwardness and ignorance of a people. Thus one could say that in al-Ayyām one meets Ṭāhā Ḥusain the novelist, the autobiographer and the researcher.

All three elements have influenced the method of presentation of events and character. The choice of the third person instead of the first serves the author's purpose far better than if he had confined himself to the child's outlook throughout. It gives him scope to depict a situation through the consciousness of the boy, but allowing himself as the author to present a more objective point of view.

Al-Ayyām was published in 1929.[1] The motives for writing the book may have been his reaction to the outcry of conservative elements against his book Fī al-Shi'r al-Jāhilī. The bitter attacks only confirmed the author's belief in the ignorance and backwardness of his countrymen. Because of it he was to be deprived of his rights as a man, just as he had been deprived of his sight in childhood. In depicting the world of Ṭāhā the child, and in portraying later his despair and frustration at the antiquated methods of teaching Arabic at the Azhar, and the conservatism , intolerance and rigid outlook of the shaikhs he struck back against the reactionary circles.

Ṭāhā Ḥusain is probably unique among contemporary Egyptian writers in his insistence on the diffusion of knowledge. He wished his people to see learning as a vital necessity of life, as much so as air and water. An overriding subject with him is the exposition of the evils of ignorance, the paralysing results of adherence to superstitions and meaningless traditions. An aim inherent in all three novels to be discussed here is the freeing of the individual from past assumptions and traditional beliefs. In varying degrees in each novel there is exhibited society governed in its outlook and way of life by traditions and customs manifested in the stronghold superstition has on the mind of the people. He exposes fearlessly the abysmal ignorance of the very men to whom society looks up, as the mainspring of knowledge and understanding. He represents the Egyptian with the modern outlook, the man who is keen on raising

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1. It first appeared in serial form in al-Hilāl. See Shawqī Ḍaif, al-Adab al-Mu'āsir (Cairo, 1957), p.246.

the standards of his countrymen by liberating them from the chains of the past. This he sees can only be achieved by the complete re-education of the public. In his various works he stresses again and again the necessity of beginning at the foundations with classical studies. "We cannot live in this age demanding all the political and intellectual independence enjoyed by the peoples of Europe while we remain dependent on them for all that nourishes the intellect and the emotions in science, philosophy, literature and the arts."[1]

In al-Ayyām the subject of education and culture permeates the whole book. The many portraits of the "boy's" life in the village kuttāb and of education in the rural area are closely linked with the author's desire to attack ignorance and the ignorant who "spread" it under the name of teaching. In the following ironical passage from al-Ayyām the author assesses the prestige of knowledge in the provinces:

> "Education in the villages and provincial towns has a glory not to be found in the capital or in its various academic institutes. There is nothing amazing or curious about it. It is the law of supply and demand applied to education as it is to any other goods. While no special importance is attached to the 'ulamā' in the city, those in the country and the shaikhs of the villages and provincial towns parade with an air of majesty and pomp. They speak and people listen to them with veneration..."[2]

He then dwells on the "culture" of the village and subtly exposes ignorance, hypocrisy and deceit of the men of religion represented

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1. Ṭāhā Ḥusain, "Niẓām al-Athīniyyīn li-Aristoṭālīs", Hilāl press (1921), p.163. Quoted by H.A.R.Gibb, in "Studies in Contemporary Arabic Literature", B.O.A.S., vol.V (1928-1930), part-III, p.456.
2. Ṭāhā Ḥusain, al-Ayyām, (Cairo, n.d.), 2 vols., vol. I, p.79.

in the pseudo-'ulamā', the impostors, the so-called fuqahā' whose only connection with religion is their memorization of the Qur'ān and the shaikhs of the turuq.[1] In another chapter deeply entrenched superstitions and the belief in magic which govern every action in the life of the people are exposed. The author presents his message through characters depicted with considerable liveliness.

Characters are not limited to those with whom the "boy" had any contact. The author's outlook influences his attitude towards a number of them. There is very little sympathy shown to the boy's family. Harsh lights are directed towards their sham respectability and the conventions to which they adhere. But it is the shaikh of the kuttāb against whom Ṭāhā Ḥusain turns his sarcasm. Only the "boy", naturally enough, obtains the author's constant sympathy. His struggles against a backward environment receive the author's appreciation and sympathy. On most occasions the child is allowed complete freedom of action. In his attempts to discover his surrounding with the limited means at hand (since he is blind) recognizing the world around him through the impressions of voice and touch and space,[2] the author has drawn one of the most moving and realistic pictures in Arabic literature of a handicapped child in a backward environment.

Ṭāhā Ḥusain conveys his message by description and narrative. Dialogue is rare and in the few cases when he resorts to dialogue, it is usually woven into the narrative as reported speech. His peculiar

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1. Ibid., pp. 80-87.
2. Ibid., pp. 3-16, 19-20.

style dominates the whole atmosphere of the book, distinguished by its purity and influenced by the masters of classical Arabic, al-Jāḥiẓ in particular. It has a music all its own, the rhythm and cadence of which are produced by the masterly use of synonyms and the repetition of words or phrases. Though much admired, those characteristics are not wholly suitable for the novel as there is a tendency towards generalization and a retarding of the flow of the narrative whereas the novel demands precision and particularization. Nevertheless this prose serves his purpose admirably in a book such as al-Ayyām. It heightens the effect of the child's deprivation, thereby conveying successfully to the reader the emotions involved. Nor is this success achieved by any conscious pursuit of fine writing, but by an accurate record of the progress of the boy's feelings and the skilful selection of vivid detail.

The autobiographical element is no longer evident in Shajarat al-Bu's (1944) and Du'ā' al-Karawān (1946), the two novels that followed later. In the dedication of Shajarat al-Bu's the author states that the book is a "picture of life in one of Egypt's provinces at the turn of the century", which he wrote while resting in Lebanon. The story traces the fortunes of three generations of a well-off middle class family, who lived in a house similar to those occupied by wealthy merchants and who "took pride in imitating their Turkish masters."[1]

Throughout the book, man's belief in providence and predestination are dominant. His life is determined without his contrib-

1. Ṭāhā Ḥusain, Shajarat al-Bu's (Cairo, n.d.), p.3.

uting to his own destiny. Crushed by traditions, social values and the community, through the agents of tradition : the shaikhs of the turuq and authority, man himself dwindles into nothing. The book stresses the misery caused by the ignorance of man and his incapacity to decide for himself. The reader is gradually made aware of the growing importance of this when he learns that the two old friends, both merchants, are arranging the marriage of their only children, Khālid the son of 'Alī and Nafīsa the "ugly" daughter of 'Abd al-Raḥmān. The marriage is agreed upon between them because 'Alī, Khālid's father, sees in his dream their Shaikh reciting more than once the following verse from the Qur'ān: "When God and his Messenger ordain a matter, neither a man believer nor a woman believer has a choice in their concern, and he who disobeys God and His Messenger has greatly followed the wrong path."[1]

Through this ill devised marriage the "tree of misery" is sown in 'Alī's house.[2] It rises from Nafīsa's 'ugliness' which is emphasized by the writer as it symbolizes the misery brought about by the ignorance manifest in the adherence to outworn traditions. As the story unfolds the seeds of misery grow and engulf the entire family. 'Alī's wife dies after a while of disillusionment.[3] She discovers that there is one more favoured and loved by her husband than she is, and more honoured, and whose word is never rejected namely, the Shaikh of the ṭarīqa. Nafīsa, made aware of her

1. Ibid., p.14; Qur'ān, 33^{36}
2. Ṭāhā Ḥusain, Shajarat al-Bu's, pp. 16, 123.
3. Ibid., p.20.

ugliness by her husband, is haunted by the fear of losing him. Her defect preys on her mind until she goes mad. The inferior position of woman and man's traditional attitude towards the female, form part of the main theme and are among the objects of Ṭāhā Ḥusain's criticism.

Life's vicissitudes are accepted by father and son as the inevitable. Marriage, divorce, fertility or barrenness, madness and death all are accepted unquestioningly as the will of God. Easy resignation to one's lot permeates the novel. "He was not thinking of marriage, nor did he choose his wife when asked to marry, but God's ordinance cannot be prevented."[1] The life of the whole family is controlled by their belief in pre-destination and the shaikhs who parade as the executors of God's words on earth. Khālid's reply when asked whether he is happy about his second engagement is significant: "The old Shaikh ordered and I obeyed, the young Shaikh (his father) called and I answered... and God is the One who chooses for us and inspires us to success."[2] His answer reveals man's utter helplessness and dependence; man deprived of his faculty of thought, in short, man wasted.

The author cleverly compares the Egyptian merchant's fatalistic attitude, leaving profit and loss to the predetermination of God with the adventurous spirit of those "foreign devils" with their scientific outlook.[3]

In Du'ā' al-Karawān (1946), Ṭāhā Ḥusain deals with the

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1. Ibid., p.37.
2. Ibid., p.95.
3. Ibid., p.48.

question of 'honour', traditionally synonymous with woman's 'chastity'. He criticizes the entrenched prejudices of society against woman and the heavy moral obligation placed on her, out of all propotion to her education or the temptation to which she is exposed.[1] The severity of the punishment recommended by society on such occasions he sees as another indication of the backwardness and ignorance of that society. Hanādī the young semi-urbanized bedouin girl is stabbed to death by her uncle on learning that she has been seduced by the engineer in whose house she serves. For the first time the double standard of morality is exposed in novel form. In the eyes of society, the woman who has erred is condemned, the man, as a rule, escapes censure. The reader is left in no doubt as to the writer's attitude towards such 'crimes of honour'. Man is presented as having no justification whatsoever for spilling "innocent blood".[2] Society is blamed for the continuation of such brutal customs and for the adherence to traditions that grant man control over the destiny of woman, and for regarding a woman's loss of chastity as a justification for her death.

The misery caused by ignorance forces itself upon the reader through his imaginative sympathy. His sincerity cannot be doubted, nor the authenticity of his portrayal denied. His personal experience and knowledge of the subjects he has written about give his novels a strongly realistic character. All three may be consulted with confidence when investigating the life and customs

1. Ṭāhā Ḥusain, Du'ā' al-Karawān (Cairo, 1946), p.97.
2. Ibid., pp. 10, 51, 53.

of provincial towns and villages.

Ṭāhā Ḥusain as noted earlier belongs to the world of the scholar, the critic and litterateur. He, like others who have written novels, has no special gifts for fiction. But he used this genre as a vehicle for his ideas. The same weaknesses observed in al-Ayyām do appear in Shajarat al-Bu's and Du'ā' al-Karawān but to a lesser extent. One thing stands out in Shajarat al-Bu's in contrast with the other two. Dialogue is used to a greater degree. The art of varying the pace of the narrative has also been developed; when to use conversation and when to interject the thoughts of the characters. As a writer he is party to all the thoughts of his various characters. His presence makes itself felt, in all three books, whether in direct intervention or in voicing his views on a subject through the main character as in the case of Āmina in Du'ā' al-Karawān . But it is his style which gives his novels their peculiar charm despite various weaknesses in their technique. His mastery of the Arabic language leaves the reader with a better appreciation of its potentialities and an understanding of how words and phrases skilfully handled not only convey meaning precisely but produce a limpid flow which heightens the emotional effect of a passage.

Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī (1905-)

Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī's fame in the world of letters in Egypt and the other Arab countries rests mainly on his essays and short stories. When asked in an interview about this, he explained that his inclination towards the "specific and inevitable" tended to weaken his control of the novel.[1] However, he has attempted to write novels and his two works in this genre: Qindīl Umm Hāshim (1944) and Saḥḥ al-Nawm (1955) are included here because of the relevance of their contents.

Ḥaqqī's life was varied. It offered him excellent opportunities for portraying Egyptian society, urban as well as rural, as his knowledge was derived from personal contact with the people and their conditions and this explains his naturalism and the general air of authenticity of his writing.

The al-Sayyida Zainab quarter and later the Khalīfa district, both popular areas of Cairo, which teem with people of all trades and crafts and are rich in Egyptian traditions and customs remounting the past, left their impact on Yaḥyā the boy and the youth, who was born and brought up there. His Turkish origin may have deepened his awareness of the popular atmosphere manifested among other things by the colloquial speech characteristic of this area. His works abound in proverbs, popular sayings and colloquialisms.

The countryside of Upper Egypt left its mark on him too. After finishing his law studies, he was sent to Manfalūṭ (1927) as an

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1. al-Ādāb, No. 7, 1960, p. 69.

assistant administrator. He considers his work there to have been of the utmost value for his literary career. "By virtue of this job, I mixed with the peasants and experienced life in the rural area with its people, its animals, its plants, its Nile, the quarries and all its problems. It was direct contact."[1] In Khallīhā 'Alā Allāh[2] he describes the mental anguish he suffered there, in being the instrument of the government who had to enforce the law, and the peasants' bitterness against the government which in their view "was not a helpful servant but a stupid and tyrannical master."[3]

But it was his work in the various embassies abroad, from 1940-1955, which brought about a radical change in his life. In Khallīhā 'Alā Allāh he depicts the tensions and processes of readjustment he had to go through. He found himself comparing social customs and values at home with those abroad and expressed his feelings about the differences in dress, behaviour on social occasions and the position of women. Much of his time as an embassy official was spent in reading and studying the intellectual movements of the time. He admired the Russian classics and later felt drawn to the style and methods of Lytton Strachey and Virginia Woolf, where "thought supersedes emotions".[4] However, it is difficult to trace the direct influence on his work of any of the many Western writers he admired. His writings present something which is genuinely Egyptian. However, the influence of Europe on him is vividly reflected in Qindīl Umm

1. From an interview with Ḥaqqī, al-Ādāb, No. 7, 1960, p. 11.
2. An autobiographical work of Ḥaqqī's, covering his childhood, youth and career as a government official. Published in book form in 1959.
3. Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī, Khallīha 'Alā Allāh, p. 115.
4. al-Ādāb, No. 7, 1960, p. 12.

Hāshim in the character of Ismā'īl, the young man from the al-Sayyida quarter who goes to England to study medicine.

In Qindīl Umm Hāshim, Ḥaqqī's theme is the clash of two cultures - the traditional way of life of the Orient and the scientific method and outlook of the West - taking place within a single individual. He presents the theme with considerable skill, by giving three separate pictures of the big square of al-Sayyida Zainab which represents the oriental way of life. Though the square is the same, each picture is different, because it emerges through the inner feelings of the hero which do not remain the same. In the first picture the square is seen through the eyes of Ismā'īl, the youth, who has been brought up there. The overcrowding, the poverty, the dirt, and the superstitious beliefs are all accepted as natural. Ismā'īl sees but does not react.[1]

The picture undergoes a substantial change when Ismā'īl returns from his study abroad. Life in the square has not changed. It is he who has. Everything he sees now is judged according to different beliefs. People, manners, customs all are observed differently. He finds the poverty and complacency of the masses revolting. He feels they are dead limbs "pressing upon his chest."[2] His mind reacts fiercely against the backwardness and ignorance of the people symbolized in the crowd's blind belief in the healing power of the oil in the lamp covered with dust and hanging over the shrine of Zainab. His reaction culminates in his smashing to pieces the lamp,

1. Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī, Qindīl Umm Hāshim. pp. 11-13, 22.
2. Ibid., p. 44.

the symbol of superstition and ignorance[1], in his desire to shake the people and wake them up to their miserable conditions. For "this acceptance is failure, this goodness is idiocy, this patience is cowardice and this gaiety is dissolution."[2]

The third picture is drawn after Ismā'īl's return from the elegant district of Cairo where he had his surgery. He is no longer the violently critical young man. His outlook has been tempered. The quarter appears different again. He is not blind to its defects, nor complacent about them. But he no longer disparages or attacks the people because of their blindness and indolence but tries to understand them, and eventually comes to love them. It is on the physical plane that he finally communicates with the masses who move blindly under the weight of their own misfortunes. A compromise has been achieved within him and his inner tensions are resolved.

The main defect of the novel lies in the author's aim of proving that science can only achieve its end when sustained by faith. His argument fails because the incidents he presents to prove his point to the reader are not convincing. We are told that Ismā'īl, the young doctor, fails in curing his cousin's eyes despite all the scientific technique he employs. But the author has overlooked a point of great significance in such a case. The girl's eyesight had been almost destroyed by the 'oil' drops, before Ismā'īl came on to the scene. Thus he confronts the young doctor with his cousin's eyes already beyond cure, and leaves them to deteriorate despite the doctor's great efforts. Ismā'īl is not given the chance to prove

1. Ibid., p. 44.
2. Ibid., p. 45.

his scientific technique as a replacement for the 'oil'. Without any justification he does not allow science to prove its efficacy. He deliberately destroys the doctor's chance of gaining the confidence of the ignorant masses in himself and his scientific methods, though the reader is told that Ismā'īl had cured hundreds of similar cases in Europe.[1] Nor does the author offer us a convincing explanation for Ismā'īl's conversion, first from religion to the scientific outlook and then back again to faith.[2] His success at the end is presented as the outcome of his dependence on God, "and God blessed his knowledge and hands."[3] His happiness he finds in the old faith and in ancient values. This arbitrary change imposed on the character cannot be easily accepted by the reader. In making his hero marry his almost blind and ignorant cousin, whom he rejected even before leaving for England, and revert to a life based on ancient shibboleths of faith and on myths, he is carrying the whole process too far.

In Sahh al-Nawm published in 1955 Ḥaqqī treats the question of 'the condition of Egypt' in two parts: Yesterday and Today. The first part attempts to exhibit the complex problems which have beset the country in the past whilst the latter is another attempt at providing the answer to those problems. Egypt is represented as an unnamed village, backward, neglected and exploited.[4] Its

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1. Ibid., p.48.
2. Ibid., p.54.
3. Ibid., p.54.
4. Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī, Sahh al-Nawm (Cairo, n.d.), pp.51-52, 62-63.

inhabitants suffer from one or more of the general complaints (disease, high prices, corruption, etc.) but are either too helpless or too apathetic to bring about any change or improve conditions.[1] The author tries to represent the various important members of society as frequenters of a tavern. In them the problems and defects are concentrated. It is they who are the first to meet the shock when society is given a jolt.[2] As for the rest of the village, presumably the masses, they are "the salt of the earth",[3] earning their living with great difficulty, yet content and patient. The answer to the village's problems comes in the form of the Ustādh, who is the awaited ruler. He comes from the village but has been absent for a long time. His return heralds the impending change.[4] He plans to put into practice a "successful treatment" for each "illness" after seeing to the "foundation", the "source of all ills".[5]

The second part, Today, exhibits the rebuilding of the village according to the vision of the Ustādh. It is the 'awakening' as the title indicates. The inhabitants begin to participate in reforming the village under the watchful eye and administration of the Ustādh and his helpers.[6] Difficulties encountered are many, the reader is told, and evil forces with destructive intentions have to be overcome. But the humanity, knowledge and political know-how[7]

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1. Ibid., p.74.
2. Ibid., p.73.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., p.80
5. Ibid., p.84.
6. Ibid., p.107.
7. Ibid., p.131

of the ruler steer the village to the promised better future.

Sahh al-Nawm reflects faithfully Haqqī's spirit. Not only is the narrator a writer, who in this case represents the author, but a few characters represent certain aspects of the author and share his outlook e.g., the husband of the lame woman, the young artist and the butcher. The idea of a leader rising from the midst of the people first met with in 'Audat al-Rūh is developed by Haqqī in Sahh al-Nawm. The dream of "the worshipped one" has materialized. But Haqqī's Ustādh is more of a human being than an idol, though the author in the person of the narrator points out that the "teacher's" pre-occupation with the problems has isolated him from the masses. His aloofness for reasons of government and his loneliness are stressed.[1]

There is a lack of vision and art in the second part of the book. The lifelike representation of changes occurring under the new regime after 1952 deprives this part of the novel of freshness of outlook. It is as if the novelist has given way to the journalist and the expectations of the reader raised in Part I are not answered. All he gets is what he already knows and experiences.

As a writer, Haqqī is constantly aware of artistic imperatives. That he is a critic as well may have enhanced this trend. He has specific views on the theme of art (such as that there is no art without craft) and argues that the outward forms of a craft can be learnt but that the spirit of a work is the spirit of the artist himself.

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1. Ibid., p. 130.

Najīb Maḥfūẓ (1922-)

Majib Maḥfūẓ's fame as the best Egyptian novelist was established after the publication of the trilogy, considered his major work, in book form, in 1956-1957. His literary activity, however, began in 1932 while he was still a student at the University of Cairo reading Philosophy.[1] His first venture was in the field of the short story. But he soon found that form inadequate for what he had to say and turned to the novel.

Maḥfūẓ read widely the works of English, French, German and Russian novelists,[2] some in the original, but the majority in translations. It is difficult to decide to what extent the structure, characterization and action in his novels were influenced by this reading as he does not follow any one writer in particular.

His first three novels, 'Abath al-Aqdār (1939), Rādōbīs (1943) and Kifāḥ Ṭībah (1944), were set in ancient Egypt. They were an expression of nationalism aiming at resurrecting the glories of the past and deriving inspiration from them for Egypt's future. Though they were his first attempts, they show no less than the later ones the characteristic qualities of his talent as a novel writer. The

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1. He graduated in 1934 with a degree in philosophy. Since then he has occupied several posts in various government departments. At present he has a high technical and advisory position in Egypt's nationalized cinema, radio and television industry. From an interview with the present writer in 1965.
2. Galsworthy, Wells, Bennett, Balzac, Zola, Flaubert, Proust, T. Mann, Tolstoy, Chekhov, Dostoyevski and Kafka were among others who interested him most. From the same interview.

autobiographical element evident in al-Ḥakīm and Ḥaqqī's writings is altogether absent from Maḥfūẓ's work. The narrative moves without interference from the author and the characters are not dependent on his temperament.

From Pharaonic Egypt, Maḥfūẓ turned to modern Egypt. The five novels he wrote between 1938-1944 but published later, al-Qāhira al-Jadīda, Khān al-Khalīlī, Zuqāq al-Midaqq, al-Sarāb, Bidāya wa Nihāya, are all set in contemporary Cairo, and the popular quarters of Cairo in particular, an area of the Capital well-known to the author. He was born in the Jamāliyya district and spent the first six years of his life in the shadow of the Sayyidnā Ḥusain mosque. Though moving later to the 'Abbāsiyya quarter, his contact with the former district continued. From 1945-1952, he was busy writing what came to be acclaimed as his major contribution to Arabic literature, The Trilogy; Bain al-Qasrain, Qasr al-Shawq, al-Sukkariyya. It provides an interesting chronicle of the changing political, social and moral attitudes of lower middle class Egyptian society.

During the fifties, a kind of lull set in as if the author was taking stock of the world around him after the change of régime in 1952. It was not until 1959, that he published in serial form in al-Ahrām the allegorical novel, Awlād Hāritnā. From the novels he wrote after 1960, the reader infers a sense of disillusionment and hopelessness, absent from his earlier writings. They reflect a growing tendency on the part of the author to dwell on man's inner struggle with himself in specific situations; a shift from the general social scene to the isolated individual, hunted or incapable

of adjustment to his environment, as in al-Liss wa al-Kilāb (1961), al-Summān wa al-Kharīf (1962), al-Tarīq (1964), al-Shahhādh (1965). In his latest novel but one, Thartharah Fawq al-Nīl (1966), the cynicism and irresponsibility of the characters reaches its height. Most of the scenes in the novels of this period are set in Egypt after 1952. However, the novels of this later period are outside the scope of this study and need not be discussed any further.

It is the second group of novels beginning with al-Qāhira al-Jadīda published in 1945 and ending with the trilogy - with the exception of al-Sarāb, the subject of which is not relevant to this study - that will be the subject of our discussion here and analysis later. Throughout these novels, the author deals with the social environment of the middle classes and their way of life in the old and new quarters of Cairo. The manners and customs of these classes are observed and the changing panorama of actual life is rendered faithfully. It is most evident in the trilogy. Eternal issues such as life and death, the relationships between God and man and various human relationships are also of concern to the author. Political allegiances and social philosophies are discussed in most of the novels, the trilogy and the novels after 1960 in particular.

Mahfūz's trilogy is in the tradition of Thomas Mann's Buddenbrooks (1901) and Galsworthy's Forsyte Saga (1906-1921) and before them in miniature, Chekhov's Three Years (1895). In it, he traces the history of three successive generations of a small bourgeois family, at great length. The inevitable differences between the generations is recorded. The tradition of the patriarchal head of a household

exercising his unlimited authority exemplified by the despotic father Aḥmad 'Abd al-Jawwād in Bain al-Qaṣrain has undergone a considerable change in the second part of the trilogy, Qaṣr al-Shawq. The second generation except for Khadīja, who to some extent inherits her father's hard, authoritative and reactionary qualities, are more easy going. The girls enjoy a more relaxed relationship with their husbands than their servile mother ever dreamt of. Yāsīn, ʿAbd al-Jawwād's eldest son from his first wife, who inherited his father's sensuality and lust for women, is far less discreet and hypocritical than his father. The major difference in the third generation as recorded in al-Sukkariyya, where the events take place between 1935 and 1944 is the acceptance of the newly emerged career woman into the world of this formerly highly conventional family, and the relatively greater freedom enjoyed by both sexes, as illustrated in the case of Aḥmad and Sawsan. Political affiliations form an integral part of their lives and the activities of the third generation (Aḥmad and his brother ʿAbd al-Munʿim) and are not kept secret from the family as Fahmī's were during the 1919 demonstrations.

Reading the trilogy one thinks of Maḥfūẓ the historian, the recorder of the life of middle class Cairo during a time when the country began the struggle for its independence in 1919, established a constitutional monarchy in 1923 and from then onward was plunged into the endless squabbles of party politics, covering a span of 30 years in all. The evolution of society is as much a subject of Maḥfūẓ's as are ʿAbd al-Jawwād's 'pleasure parties' or Kamāl's thirst for knowledge. In the last two volumes of the trilogy there is a general

desire to get Egypt out of the 'rut', a wish to cure the country of its ills. But Maḥfūẓ does not come forward with any positive solutions. Socialism is suggested at one time, though its meaning is not made clear, and the idea is never fully developed or put into practice. We are left with the feeling that it is the middle class values which must determine the form of socialism.

Class aspirations, the father figure, heredity, sex, drugs, insecurity, corruption and time, are themes the reader comes across in all the novels of this period to a varying degree. In the case of the first of these themes, there is one or more characters from the middle or especially lower middle class whose dissatisfaction with his social status and his poverty, and whose desire to enjoy all the comforts of life drive him to attempt to climb the social ladder. As it is one of the most prominent features of the novels, and one which is intimately connected with the social and economic condition of the characters apart from their specific psychological characteristics, a few examples of this will not be inappropriate. Two very striking instances are those of Maḥjūb in al-Qāhira al-Jadīda and Ḥasanain in Bidāya wa Nihāya.

Maḥjūb's class aspirations find a fertile field in the corrupt social and political setting of the mid-thirties in which he moves. Bribery, immorality, resignation to foreign rule and reaction are the norm. His nonchalant attitude is summarized in the word tuzz[1] (I couldn't care less) and this is the "principle" by which he

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1. N. Maḥfūẓ, al-Qāhira al-Jadīda (Cairo, n.d.), p. 25.

assesses and values everything. By virtue of this 'philosophy' he becomes the secretary of a minister in less than three months from the date of his graduation from University, an undreamt of position for people like him were they to resort to honest means.

The selfish character, impelled only by his own interests regardless of social values is further developed in the character of Ḥasanain. Whereas Maḥjūb makes the reader feel sorry for him despite his unpleasant opportunist attitude, the same cannot be said of Ḥasanain. It may be that the author's own unintentional prejudice against Maḥjūb from the start, restrains the reader from condemning him outright. By presenting Maḥjūb in an unfavourable light, as an unscrupulous scoundrel, the author has deprived him of choice, and determined his destiny. Not so Ḥasanain, who is a more fully developed character acting in complete independence of the author. He represents a marvellous example of the egoist whose self-interest blinds him to all moral scruples. He is a far more despicable character than Maḥjūb. And it is the freedom of action allowed him by the author that brings about the reader's condemnation once his choice is made. His desire for wealth and respectability drive him to condemn his sister to death, though she has never denied any of his wishes in so far as she was capable of meeting them, lest her 'immoral' behaviour should stigmatize him for life and act as an obstacle to the realization of his ambitions. His fate though irretrievable in a way that Maḥjūb's is not, for he commits suicide, does not arouse the reader's sympathy. It is Maḥjūb's bad luck that brings about his downfall. With Ḥasanain, the discovery of his sister's 'fall'

and his failure to change his elder brother's disgraceful way of life fill him with anger and despair of ever realizing his dream of respectability.

Ḥamīda in Zuqāq al-Midaqq is another exemplification of the author's concern with man's desire for wealth and the improvement of his social condition. Ḥamīda, young, spirited and beautiful, resents the dull, uninspiring life she has to lead in the environment of the changeless alley. Ambitious she dreams of a more exciting life, which money and a better social status would make possible. Like Maḥjūb and Ḥasanain, she wishes greatly to change her condition. But she is neither an opportunist like the former nor a selfish hypocrite like the latter. Waiting for her dream to materialize, her restlessness does not develop into a struggle against her status. When the hope for a better life through marriage falls through, because of the sudden illness of the old but rich, prospective bridegroom, her dissatisfaction with the alley reaches its climax. She prefers to leave it and all that it symbolises, lured away by a smooth procurer, and enjoy the riches and luxury offered her in return for leading the life of a prostitute, rather than stay there, marry lawfully, and remain poor and bored to death.

A theme with which Maḥfūẓ is apparently preoccupied and which runs through all the novels of this period is the interrelation of man and his environment. He sees man as the product of his environment, and governed by his particular circumstances. Strangely enough, he retains the notion of a transcendent governing Providence. In his universe, there seems to be no reconciliation between man's

aspirations and the forces of nature representing God's ordinance. All his ambitious characters who aspire for change fall, regardless of their qualities, and the means by which they attempt to bring about that change. They are always punished by trying to rise above the social stratum to which they were restricted by birth. A few examples will suffice. We read of 'Abbās al-Ḥulū's death, killed in a brawl,[1] just as his financial condition had improved and he was about to move from the alley on getting married. Ḥasanain, the social climber, commits suicide.[2] Ḥasan, defiant and bold, is persecuted and his days are numbered.[3] Ḥusain Kirsha goes back to the "alley of nothingness" after having known a more promising life.[4] Maḥjūb's defiance of the accepted code leads to his downfall and "exile" to an obscure job in Aswān.[5] In Ḥamīda's case, the wealth and comfort she gains as a prostitute can hardly be regarded as compensatory. According to traditional and moral codes, she has fallen to the bottom of the social ladder.[6] Only those characters who are either resigned to their lot and whose attitude is an unquestioning acceptance of and satisfaction and contentment with life, or those who drift aimlessly, with no commitments, no ambitions (e.g. Kamāl in the trilogy) escape scot-free.

In choosing the old quarters as the setting in which the majority of the characters move, the emphasis is on changelessness

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1. Maḥfūẓ, Zuqāq al-Midaqq (Cairo, n.d.), pp. 360-362.
2. Maḥfūẓ, Bidāya wa Nihāya (Cairo, n.d.), p. 382.
3. Ibid., pp. 359-361.
4. Maḥfūẓ, Zuqāq al-Midaqq, pp. 260-264.
5. Maḥfūẓ, al-Qāhira al-Jadīda, p. 212.
6. Maḥfūẓ, Zuqāq al-Midaqq, pp. 336-337.

The Midaqq alley, for instance, is apparently ancient, dilapidated, smells strongly of the past, and exists almost "in isolation", from the world surrounding it.[1] Kāmil, the fat, pastry shop keeper, symbolises the habitual torper engulfing the alley. He is in "a constant doze".[2] The introduction of a wireless into Kirsha's old cafe in order to entertain the customers with modern songs instead of the traditional listening to the shā'ir, is the limit of the intrusion of the outer world into the alley.[3]

The characters' complete acceptance of the changelessness of the place where they were born reflects their own static condition. Strikingly enough, any change in a character's life is only conceived possible by a move into a different environment. A new flat, or house in a different district, heralds a change in the life of the people involved. The element of struggle to bring about a change in one's own area is alien to Maḥfūẓ's novels. Not one of his ambitious, dissatisfied characters dreams or cares of changing the place he dislikes, in order to make it a better area to live in for all concerned. It is as if the author believes that it is hopeless even to try to change an environment so deeply imbued with the traditions of the past. Perhaps it is a lack of faith in man's power and capacity to accomplish any effective change in the order of things. It would be tempting fate and that which has been ordained. Thus, progress is inevitably very slow. Any change is determined by the evolution of society, by time,[4] not by man's deliberate

1. Ibid., p. 5.
2. Ibid., p. 6.
3. Ibid., p. 11.
4. In an interview Maḥfūẓ stated that "Time was the hero of his trilogy".

struggle to improve conditions.

It is significant that even the characters who show mental alertness, intellectual acumen and dedication to a cause are repressed in the same way by the author. Fahmī is killed by a bullet in what was supposed to be a peaceful demonstration in 1919.[1] ʿAlī Ṭāhā, Aḥmad Rāshid, Sawsan, Quldus, all of whom are interested in issues concerning society at large, are never allowed to act on their opinions (though indeed, some of them are rather vague). They are not given a chance to work out practically the soundness of their beliefs. Explaining the defeat and failure of his main characters in their attempts to change their lot, Maḥfūẓ said: "I wrote these novels at a time when optimism was considered a kind of drug and an acceptance of actuality". He stated that he intended the sad ends of his novels to act as an instigation to change prevailing conditions.[2]

Throughout the novels, the reader encounters prostitutes and brothels. Scenes of 'pleasure parties' with music and drink, held in the homes or houseboats of the female singers in the early decades of the twentieth century, which are an interesting record of a now obsolete custom, abound in the trilogy. We read in detail in Zuqāq al-Midaqq of a modern, fashionable brothel run by a smart procurer who is on the look out for sensual young females. Prostitutes who play the role of the loyal mistress are found in Bidāya wa Nihāya. We learn of servant girls "exported' during the

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1. Maḥfūẓ, Bain al-Qasrain (Cairo, n.d.), p. 573.
2. Rose al-Yūsuf, "al-Kātib wa al-Tabaqa al-Latī Yuʿabbir ʿAnhā", 14 October, 1957.

war (1939-1945) from Khān al-Khalīlī to other parts of Cairo and of their return to the old quarter to practice their new profession. Then there is always the poor peasant girl in the city who sells her body for a few piastres as depicted in al-Qāhira al-Jadīda. Hints at homosexual tendencies and practices on the part of various male characters are met with in most of the novels. In Zuqāq al-Midaqq, Kirsha's homosexuality is more openly proclaimed.[1] Maḥfūẓ explains the prevalence of this perversion among his characters as an indication of the "political corruption of the old régime", for beauty whether in the male or female was exploited.[2]

However, it is not the detailed description of the encounters and parties, but the underlying meaning the reader should deduce from such a phenomenon that is significant. Characters seem to achieve self-expression in them. Their frustration and meaningless existence is relieved by prostitution. It is an act of sweet revenge against an order of things against which they are too small, too insignificant to stand. Above all, it appears to be a protest against failure, stagnation and the absence of any real communication with the other sex.

The central action almost invariably takes place in the world of the small bourgeoisie. The scope is narrow and usually limited to the house, the café, the brothel and, sometimes, the office. The male characters are generally minor civil servants, tradesmen,

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1. N. Maḥfūẓ, Zuqāq al-Midaqq, pp. 59-61, 96-99.
2. Ibrāhīm al-Wardānī, "Riḥla fī Ra's Najīb Maḥfūẓ", an article in the Jumhūriyya paper, Cairo, 9 April 1960, p. 20.

small shopkeepers and craftsmen and students belonging to that class. Women are mostly confined to their homes, looking after the family and gossiping with neighbours and friends. Very few among them have attended school and fewer still have employment. To all appearances, characters of both sexes are occupied most of the time by petty, mundane things. They exist rather than live. Their major interest is to have money, marry and live comfortably. They exemplify the middle class world with its limited outlook. Occasional glimpses into the life of the upper middle class are given.

In all his novels, Maḥfūẓ is the detached observer. He attempts to render a true-to-life picture of that section of society he has chosen to depict. His neutrality makes it difficult for the reader to detect his point of view on various issues of vital importance which he introduces into his work. The difficulty is increased further by his tendency to present with equal interest two or more points of view expressed by characters of different political standing. From the general atmosphere of his books, one may conclude that he is not conservative in outlook. On occasions, a slight preference for idealists such as Kamāl and Aḥmad in the trilogy may be inferred. Perhaps the nearest answer one can get is found in the third volume of the trilogy, in Sawsan's comments and judgement on the writings of Kamāl, who to some extent reflects the author's own attitude to life. She listens to her colleague, Aḥmad, who is also Kamāl's nephew, stating that he cannot discover

his uncle's point of view as he "is a man who is neither hot nor cold . . .. He studies democracy and communism, and he also studies Nazism." - "Then he has no point of view," comes Sawsan's decisive reply. She goes on to explain, "he represents the cultured bourgeoisie. He reads, he enjoys and he wonders. You may find him bewildered confronting the absolute. His dilemma may reach the point of pain but he is oblivious of the real sufferers on his way." Aḥmad thinks for a while, then says: "But he often describes the conditions of the workers and peasants." After a pause, Sawsan says: "He confines his writings to descriptions and analysis . . .. This is passive work."[1]

Detail is a dominant element in the style of Maḥfūẓ's novels. His interest in detail reaches its climax in the first volume of the trilogy. Environment and social life is described at great length. Houses, alleys, streets, shops, offices, all are depicted with great accuracy. Family and café gatherings, pleasure parties, funerals, various social occasions, national events have a life-like quality. The main characters are analysed at length and discussions - though interesting in themselves - abound, but are often irrelevant to the development of character or theme. This is apt to hinder the flow of the narrative and render the pace very slow. Sometimes, this is done deliberately to create the right atmosphere. Coincidences occur especially in the earlier works and play an effective role

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1. Maḥfūẓ, al-Sukkariyya (Cairo, n.d.), p. 250.

in the structure of the novel (Maḥjūb marrying Iḥsān in al-Qāhira al-Jadīda; Ḥasanain having a seat next to the Yusrī family in the cinema, in Bidāya wa Nihāya) make the sequence of events less convincing to the reader. In his later novels, he came to avoid them. However, a few technical deficiencies should not prevent one from doing justice to the skilful construction of his novels in general. Bidāya wa Nihāya in particular shows considerable artistic maturity.

Literary Arabic is used throughout the novels with ease. Maḥfūẓ succeeds to a great degree in expressing psychological nuances. Exchanges in light conversation are distinguished by their naturalness and liveliness. There is no lapse into verbosity as is common among those writers who use the colloquial indiscriminately. Maḥfūẓ's stand on the choice of literary Arabic as a medium of expression is clear. He sees in the use of colloquial instead of grammatical Arabic, an insult to the language that unites such a large number of human beings, and an insult to art itself.[1]

Through Maḥfūẓ's serious cultivation of the genre, the novel gained a respectable position in the world of Arabic literature.

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1. Ḥiwār (Beirut, 1963), No. 3, p. 67.

Yūsuf al-Sibā'ī (1917 -)

Yūsuf al-Sibā'ī is one of the most prolific Egyptian writers. His bibliography comprises to date over thirty titles, most of which are works of fiction, either novels or short stories. A number of plays and collections of essays on a large variety of subjects complete the list.

For the purpose of our study two of his works are of special interest: Arḍ al-Nifāq (The Land of Hypocrisy) 1949 and al-Saqqā Māt (The water-carrier died) 1952. The latter is considered one of his finest and most realistic novels. Other well known novels such as the two volume long Rudda Qalbī (1954) and Innī Rāḥila the story of an upper class woman in diary form (1950) have a strong element of romanticism and sentimentality. They are rich in detailed accounts of class differences and there is an interesting realistic description of the life of the cadets in the Military College in the former, an aspect of Egyptian life al-Sibā'ī was particularly good at portraying as it was mostly based on his own experiences as one of the College's graduates.

Arḍ al-Nifāq is not a novel in the strict sense. It is a series of episodes loosely strung together exposing what the writer meant the title to indicate, the hypocrisy of society. It is given a certain unity by the fact that the incidents recorded happen to the same man, the narrator, who may be taken to be the author himself. In the introduction he states his intention to be as "candid as I possibly can". He does not assume that he

he has been "completely successful". He admits that "there are topics which I could not discuss, and lines which I crossed out after having written them." The reason for the omission he declares, is to give the book the chance "to see the light, and for you to be able to read it."[1]

The plot is simple. In the first chapter, the narrator comes across "a merchant of morals", for whom times are lean, for his 'goods' are not in demand. Inquiring as to what his goods are, the narrator is surprised to learn that the man sells such stuff as "courage, chivalry, loyalty, sacrifice, generosity ...",[2] gratis and not measured in pounds but in length of "time"[3] according to the wishes of the customer. Wondering why he does not change his goods for other more profitable commodities, the merchant explains that the stuff in demand has long been out of stock. Cowardice, flattery, meanness and slyness ..., have all been consumed and hypocrisy was what was most in demand.[4] In fact, everybody asked for it so that the government saw fit to take possession of all the hypocrisy the shop had. From then on, it became government property and a system for distributing it by rations was laid down. But those who helped the government and enjoyed its favour obtained the lion's share, whilst the rest of the people received nothing. When the latter protested, the government solved the problem by throwing what was left of

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1. Yūsuf al-Sibā'ī, Ard al-Nifāq (Cairo, 2nd ed. 1952), p. 8.
2. Ibid., p. 31.
3. Ibid., pp. 26-27.
4. Ibid., p. 36.

hypocrisy into the Nile, thus enabling every individual to get his share by drinking the "contaminated" water. "Thus sir,' continued the merchant, 'they became a hypocritical people, and their land became the land of hypocrisy."[1]

Against this background, the author sets out to unfold the social scene. The narrator starts off with "ten days of courage" and finds himself in a quandary from which he is extricated by swallowing a different substance, so from "courage" to "generosity and chivalry" and finally to the "concentrated powder of morals", the "essence" of morals itself. The "draughts" the narrator takes of these various qualities lead him into ever increasing difficulties because of his unorthodox response and reaction to the ills and abuses he comes across in his daily rounds. With sarcasm and wit al-Sibā'ī exposes and attacks the major ills of the country through his morally fortified hero: the parliamentary system, the election campaigns, the press, the slums, poverty and over-population. Minor wrongs do not escape his pen either, such as the ill-treatment of servants and the family system. All are stripped of cant and exposed to the harsh light of truth.

The attack is often fierce, but the change he sought was basically neither political nor social, but moral. Emphasis all through the book is not on a change of institutions but on a 'change of heart', which the narrator actually realizes. Frustrated,

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1. Ibid., pp. 37-38.

he throws the "essence of morals" into the Nile. The mask of deceit and evil is lifted. Matters begin to improve after an initial period of confusion, shock, fright and shame, when everybody is laid bare and tries hard to conceal his "nakedness".[1] How eventually things improve and evils are remedied the reader is not told. All he learns is that the answer lies in applying the saying: "Treat the people as you wish to be treated by them."[2]

Technically the novel leaves much to be desired. The author admits the probability of some "exaggeration" and some "fantasy"[3] in the narrative. He states that he intended the story to take the shape of a dream at the end of which he would wake up and find himself "on a sofa at home".[4] But as fact came to outweigh fiction, he deemed it "above being a mere dream, especially as it is a sincere cry uttered from the depth of my heart."[5]

There is no doubt about the author's sincerity or his desire to change man into a better being in order to realize a better world. The candour of his exposition of the various ills had not been met with before in Egyptian fiction. But much of that candour has been tempered by al-Sibā'ī's humour. However, the main weakness of the novel lies in the author's conception of a remedy. This is based on a misconception of the root of the problem which

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1. Ibid., p.526.
2. Ibid., p.528.
3. Ibid., p.529.
4. Ibid., p.529.
5. Ibid., p.530.

al-Sibā'ī believes to be "lack of morality" and not "lack of bread". He is a realist when his narrator mixes with all sorts, conditions and classes of men (not so very different from the conventional picaresque novel), he resorts to magic, when it comes to the cure.

The loose, episodic, picaresque form of Ard al-Nifāq, is replaced in al-Saqqā Māt by a formal plot. The theme is that of life and death and man's patience and endurance of both. By understanding death and looking it straight in the face, every-day hardships can be endured and overcome. This concept is woven into the narrative with considerable success. The main plot is concerned with the life of a water-carrier, Shūsha, a man of integrity and good nature, and his lively, witty and energetic young son, Sayyid al-Dunk, "a water-carrier in miniature".[1] The sub-plot revolves round Shḥāta the professional mourner who accompanies the dead on their journey to the grave. The two plots are skilfully united and a firm structure is created out of diverse material.

The setting is Cairo in the 1920s, especially the popular quarter of al-Ḥusainiyya. "Changes have occurred since then," writes the author, but many of its distinct features are still there, the most important of which and the most closely connected with our story is the government's water tap."[2] This tap stands in

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1. Y. al-Sibā'ī, al-Saqqā Māt (Cairo, n.d.), p.19
2. Ibid., p.10.

front of a small kiosk in which Sayyid al-Dunk sits and from which he issues his orders to the long queue of men and women with their tin cans and waterskins awaiting their turn to get them filled.[1] The whole quarter is one foul area of Cairo, with its mesh of narrow unpaved alleys, its heaps of garbage, its pools of stagnant water, its old and dilapidated houses. The author's description of the filth of this slum area is accurate and outspoken.

Against this setting the characters of the novel move. They represent the hardworking poor of the lower class. The reader meets people like Salāma the bean-seller (fawwāl), ʿAlī, the tinsmith, Maḥmūd the butcher, Zakī al-Zain, the greengrocer, Ḥajja Zamzam the proprietress of the maṣmat,[2] the Ḥajj Surūr, the undertaker, ʿAzīza Nawfal, the prostitute, and Sharaf al-Dīn al-Dabbāḥ the pimp. But the most important characters and the best drawn are Shūsha, his son Sayyid al-Dunk, Āmina the blind grandmother, and Shḥāta Afandī.

The author portrays with realism and sensitivity the daily life of these people, their hardships, joys and sorrows. A lively and accurate picture emerges of the water-carrier on his rounds emptying his water-skin in the vessels kept for the purpose in the houses of that area. Some of the most interesting and amusing scenes depicted with great vividness are those of the children playing their various games in the alleys which constitute their

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1. Ibid.
2. A place where the carcases of the slaughtered animals are scalded.

only playground, or of their attendance at the kuttāb. Colourful pictures are drawn of a mawlid and a wedding held in the quarter. Informative and vivid is the account given of Shūsha and his son in the public bath. In contrast is the more sober picture of the funeral procession preceded by a few professional mourners.

The mean and the chivalrous, the simple and the shrewd, the petty jelousies, are to be found here as in any other section of the society. Al-Sibā'ī neither idealizes his characters, nor depreciates them. They are patently human beings, not brutes or angels. Chivalry presents itself in the person of Shūsha, without whose generosity, Shḥāta, the penniless professional mourner would have been stripped of all his clothes by the ruthless Ḥajja Zamzam, for not paying four piastres, the price of his lunch at her maṣmaṭ.[1] True friendship develops between the two men, drawing its force from Shḥāta's philosophic view of death and life. With his own death, the two plots fuse as Shūsha takes his friend's place in accompanying the dead after finishing distributing the water from the tap, being in the meantime promoted to the kiosk. His fear of death is slowly overcome and he begins to feel a spiritual delight and victory over life. However, the reader cannot help suspecting the author of slightly overloading his water-carrier with the burden of a philosophy which would prove too heavy for anyone like him in

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1. Ibid., pp. 66-75.

normal circumstances.

Shūsha's sudden death is one of the weaknesses in the novel. The reader is left with the feeling that the water-carrier has been snatched away without any justification except perhaps the author's intention of ending his story, especially as his death is purely an effect of chance,[1] (the house collapses on him while he is resting) for which the reader is not at all prepared.

Weaknesses apart, the novel is full of accurate observations and experiences that are rendered with realism and sympathy. The various characters come immediately alive in their speech and can be well characterized by the words put in their mouths. The dialogue is in local dialect, is natural and flows with great ease. But the author cannot refrain from stepping forward at intervals and talking to the reader in his own person. Moreover, by compressing the lapse of so many years into the sentence, "Sayyid (the boy) became a man, married and had a child",[2] the author destroys the sense of time. However, to be set against this, is the fact that al-Saqqā Māt is the only contemporary novel which portrays the life of this stratum of the city population. It is gratifying that an interest has been shown in this class, and that the attempt has been made and been successful to create the atmosphere of such a place.

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1. Ibid., pp. 467-468.
2. Ibid., p. 486.

'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sharqāwī (1920 -)

The importance given by the new régime in its pronouncements to the tiller of the soil left its mark on the novel. Between 1952 and 1960 there appeared three novels in which the life of the Egyptian peasant and the village community are drawn with greater realism than ever before. All three novels have one feature in common: the setting is pre-1952 Egypt. Their authors reflect, each in his own individual style and outlook, part of the story of the "miserable human herd"[1] under a "feudal system".[2]

The first of these novels to appear was al-Arḍ (1954) by 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sharqāwī. It was an immediate success. It depicts the life of the peasants in a Delta village, set against the political ferments of the time; the rule of Ṣidqī Pasha and the Sha'b party in the 1930's. The major conflict is of an economic nature. It takes place between the "Pasha", the representative of the government, and his men in the village on the one side, and the simple, miserable peasants fighting for their existence on the other. Though the peasant is economically crushed and his way of life is dominated by age old traditions and bound by outworn customs, he shows signs of awakening, that take the form of questioning the order of things, and he attempts to struggle out of the difficulties

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1. Anwar al-Ma'addāwī, "Riwāyat al-Arḍ Bain Aydiyologiyyat al-Fann wa wāqi' al-Ḥayyāt", al-Ādāb, No. 5, May, 1955.
2. The term 'feudal' came to be applied to the highly capitalized estates in the old régime by the official statements of the new government after 1952. See D. Warriner, Land Reform and Development (London, 1951), p. 13.

and evade the burdens forced upon him by the governing class. Despite the heaviness and gloom some of the scenes reflect, the atmosphere generally is one of hope and better things to come. This very spirit of defiance and hope distinguishes al-Ard from all other Egyptian novels in which the peasant had ever been portrayed.

The peasant in al-Ard is seen in relation to the land, dependent on it as his only source of income, while the land is dependent on the irrigation it receives. Successive scenes turn round the fight for water, the very essence fo the peasant's existence. At times, this fight takes place among the peasants themselves when their frustration and helplessness are vented on one another.[1] On other occasions it is between them and the officials representing the government.[2] Their struggle against authority takes two forms. It is either passive resistance taking the form of a petition written by the village teacher[3] to those in power, or more effectively, active defiance of government orders and officials by "stealing" the Pasha's water that the government so lavishly grants him. The government reacts in the usual manner. The"rebels" are imprisoned and subjected to various humiliating punishments.[4]

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1. ʿAbd al-Rahmān al-Sharqāwī, al-Ard (Cairo, 1954), p. 178.
2. Ibid., pp. 71-72, 395-397, 320.
3. Ibid., pp. 83-84.
4. Ibid., pp. 266-269.

In addition to the above, al-Ard contains many an episode which sheds light on the life of the village community, whether hard and depressing or gentle and lighthearted. The account of the consummation of the marriage of Waṣīfa's sister; the scene at Abū Swailem's when the petition is being written; 'Abd al-Hādī's vexatious comments on Shaikh al-Shinnāwī's orthodox stand; the theatrical staging by the Sha'b party of the reception of one of its ministers, and the sabotage of the construction of the new road, are all effective in this vein. Above all, the book reflects the solidarity of the peasants in the hour of distress. Humorous scenes are interspersed throughout, relieving the tension created by serious events. The scene of the women folk attacking the 'umda for having sent their men to prison,[1] and the episode of the Qur'ān reciter at the ceremony of mourning, when he unwittingly repeats the verse "and look at your donkey" seven times, coinciding with the entrance of the ma'mūr into the marquee to offer his condolences to the family of the 'umda[2], are very funny indeed. Skilful use of the local vernacular creates a highly natural atmosphere. Al-Ard is one of the very few novels in which dialogue in the colloquial has effectively evoked the spirit of a place (here rural) and enhanced the liveliness of the characters.

Whilst succeeding through a string of scenes and episodes in

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1. Ibid., pp. 250-254.
2. Ibid., pp. 329-331.

presenting the daily life and people of the village with accuracy and realism, the purpose of the novel is not altogether clear. This vagueness may stem from not presenting the peasant's case strongly and convincingly in terms of the class struggle. The abrupt dismissal of 'Abd al-Hādī, one of the best drawn characters, as a suitable suitor for Waṣīfa for no apparent reason, and the likewise sudden emergence of ʿAmm Kassāb the cabman, as her prospective husband give the novel an unsatisfactory end. The possible suggestion of a joint peasant-worker alliance in the Waṣīfa-Kassāb marriage is too thin to seem credible.

Al-Sharqāwī is himself involved in the character of the narrator. This considerable degree of identification between author and narrator raises the book above the mere 'chronicle', but leads to the technical defect that is almost inevitable in a novel in which the story is related in the first person. The portrayal is limited to the range of sight and hearing of the narrator. Any deviation from this device weakens the credibility of the analysis, comments and descriptions of unseen situations. Al-Sharqāwī, once he begins to describe a scene does not pause to consider this point. Moreover, he is apt to forget that the whole narrative is supposed to be seen through the eyes of a young boy in his early teens, and he sometimes imposes the mature outlook and judgement of the adult he now is, on the people and the incidents occuring in the village.

Apart from al-Ard, al-Sharqāwī has written two novels to which reference will be made briefly, Qulūb Khāliya (1957) and al-Shawāri'

al-Khalfiyya (1958). The atmosphere of the former is not purely rustic as in al-Ard. There are characters who come from the city (Cairo), students returning from their summer holiday, families escaping from the heat of the city, and individuals who exploit the needs of the poor villagers, especially girls, by displaying the attractions of city life. Whereas in al-Ard the interest of the people is wholly confined to the land, in Qulūb Khāliya, emphasis is on the developing village, not a few of whose inhabitants aspire to a better life outside it. The communal spirit found in al-Ard is also met with in the second novel. The solidarity of the villagers is evident when they learn that one of them is to be banned from the village by the authorities.

In his third novel al-Shawāriʿ al-Khalfiyya the setting is no longer the countryside but Cairo. In it he depicts the people's uprising against the occupying forces and their Egyptian agents. Both novels, though written with considerable skill, lack the vitality and freshness of al-Ard. In that work al-Sharqāwī shows himself as the novelist of the soil with a true understanding of the people whose life it shapes. He is more at home there and, therefore, more successful in describing them. For he himself was born and brought up in a village in the Nile delta and spent his early schooldays in a village school before going to Cairo for

his secondary and higher studies.[1] Although he has written a number of short stories and plays, much of his work has been political and literary essays.

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1. Before graduating from the law faculty in 1943 he had already published his first literary attempts in magazines and newspapers. In the following years he became chief editor of a literary journal which was suspended in 1946 for its opposition to the British Military Pact. At present he is a member of the World Peace Congress and occupies a prominent position in the cultural life of his country. See Horst Goeseke, Der Bunte Gilbab (Verlag Volk und Welt - Berlin 1961) pp. 329-330.

Iḥsān ʿAbd al-Quddūs[1] (1919 -)

Among Egyptian literary figures Iḥsān ʿAbd al-Quddūs is one of the best known throughout the Arab world. His fame rests on his political writings as a journalist in the weekly magazines (Rose al-Yūsuf and Sabāḥ al-Khair etc.) as well as on his several collections of short stories and a few widely read novels. His interest in politics is evident in much of his fiction. Questions such as political affiliations, class superiority, lack of purpose and irresponsible attitudes to life, sexual relationships, marriage for love or wealth, exploitation of the helpless and weak, are examined in a series of works written in the fifties and early sixties. His plain style and directness of approach have attracted a large audience especially among the middle and upper middle classes.

As far as this study is concerned his first novel Anā Ḥurra (1954) has been chosen for the special interest it shows in the question of woman, her position, and her desire for freedom, and the writer's comparative frankness in handling such a theme. The

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1. The son of a middle-class Cairo family, whose father turned actor though qualified as an engineer, and whose mother, who after a highly successful career on the stage, retired and founded Egypt's influential political magazine, giving it her name, Rose al-Yūsuf. After graduation with a law degree in 1942, Iḥsān soon joined his mother's staff and began writing on political affairs. His articles were distinguished by their outspokenness and attacks against the government's policies, which led to fines and brief imprisonments in 1945, 1950 and 1951. After 1952 he developed an earlier interest in the field of fiction.

question of woman in a conventional society and her relation to the other sex is a recurrent feature in Iḥsān's fiction. However, in Anā Ḥurra he is specifically concerned with the meaning of freedom and the extent of its application. He seeks to show, as he himself states in a foreward, that: "There is no such thing as what is called freedom, the most free among us is a slave to the principles he believes in and the goal he seeks." It is significant that he chooses a female as the main character through whom he wishes to prove his point. For though the freedom of both sexes is restricted because of social taboos, woman is the real sufferer because of her inferior status and man's unequivocal pre-dominance.

Iḥsān depicts his heroine as a strong-minded wilful girl, with a conventional middle class background, in search of independence from both parental and marital control. Her own experience leads her to discover that only through education and work can she achieve social and economic independence, freedom from the traditional economic dependence on the other sex, and the social chains that accompany it. She pursues her goal with determination, letting neither family nor social considerations stop her from achieving it. On graduation day she views her certificate as a "document of liberation from slavery".[1] When she receives her first salary she feels she has finally achieved complete independence, and won the freedom she has struggled so hard to get.

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1. Ibid., p. 133.

The story should have ended here or else been developed differently from the way in which it has been. The author in attempting to prove that freedom does not exist confuses freedom in the abstract with the social implications of freedom. By letting his heroine achieve economic self-sufficiency through education and gainful employment he gives her the freedom she longs for, thereby automatically endowing her with the power of choice and the right to use that power and live according to her choice with full responsibility for her decisions. Yet when she decides to live with the man she loves and give up her well-paid post, in order to devote more of her time to him, the author explains this decision of hers as "loss of her freedom", and sees her new position as no different from that of her conventional aunt whose whole life was limited to the service of her husband.[1] Strangely enough the author appears to have based his conclusion on the external similarity between two fundamentally different cases. For not only does Amīna's 'lover' accomplish great achievements through her constant support and devoted help, but it is this very freedom she enjoys that enabled her to decide her way of life regardless of the form it takes.

Despite this confusion in the concept of freedom, Amīna is a well drawn character. Her actions throughout are consistent with her determination to be free. And though her life becomes completely involved with her lover's she remains an essentially independent

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1. Ibid., p. 179.

person, even if the author thinks otherwise. The author's style suffers occasionally from his journalistic tendencies; he himself acknowledges the fact in the preface.[1] Nevertheless Anā Ḥurra is a welcome change from the novels where woman is portrayed in her traditional role. Its importance lies in the exploration of new territory. Woman here is no longer a timid and passive character, but is conceived as a human being with a will and determination of her own, and given the right to decide and assert herself.

His only other work which concerns us here, and that only to a limited extent, is his two volume novel La Tuṭfi' al-Shams published in 1957. The theme is adjustment to a new order. It is the story of an upper class family and the efforts of the children to find a place in Egypt after 1952. Through the problems and difficulties encountered by each, Aḥmad the eldest son, in particular, the author, with his usual candour deals with a number of questions such as class disparity, favouritism and nepotism in the civil service, lack of purpose, non-involvement and irresponsibility about one's duty and country. Involvement in the Suez War leads the main characters to a kind of identification with his country and an eventual victory over class snobbery.

The narrative in most of 'Abd al-Quddūs's long novels suffers from the usual defects of serial publication; the lack of opportunity for revision and the planning of the novel in terms of each serial part instead of in terms of the complete work. However,

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1. Ibid., pp. 7-10.

because of his serial publication not only did he reach a far wider reading public, but a close relationship ensued between author and readers, women in particular, whose response must have influenced the general trend of a story while still in progress.

Ḥusain Mu'nis

Ḥusain Mu'nis is a scholar, who has written a number of books on historical subjects.[1] In addition, he has also translated from the Spanish works by Palencia and Garcia Gomez on the history of Andalusian thought and Andalusian poetry respectively. Ahlan wa Sahlan published in 1958 is his first and only novel. The plot originated in a real event, "the visit of the King (Fu'ād)". Kafr Suhail, the village in which most of the action takes place, was where his father worked as deputy postmaster. Ḥusain himself was born in Suez and grew up in Damietta near which the family owned two faddāns of land to which they would resort on holidays.[2] Mixing with the peasants during their stay in the country, Ḥusain learnt a great deal about their way of life, which he later cleverly used in his novel. He modelled his characters on many a live peasant he knew.[3] A number of incidents that made up the narrative have all been based on actual happenings whether in the village itself or Cairo.[4]

Ahlan wa Sahlan is one of the most delightful Egyptian novels. Though it is well over 400 pages, it is not prolix. The sequence of happenings from the moment the telephone rings and announces to the sleepy operator the news of the King's impending visit to Kafr Suhail, is convincingly contrived and the right atmosphere

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1. Essai sur la chute du Califat Umayyade de Cordoue; Fatḥ al-ʿArab lil-Maghreb; Ṣuwar min al-Buṭūla; Miṣr wa Risālatuhā, Riyāḍ al-Nufūs li Abī Bakr al-Malkī, Fajr al-Andalus.
2. From an interview with the author in 1966.
3. The same interview.
4. Ibid.

is set from the start. Kafr Suhail was a village "hidden in the midst of the Ṣa'īd",[1] so much so that it appeared "as if those who planned it, deliberately hid it from sight."[2] However it was distinguished from the rest of the neighbouring villages by being near the railway line which runs from Qenā to Qūs. Only a large marsh of a few acres seperated it from that line.[3] This sleepy village receives a sudden jolt one December afternoon in the late 1920s. It is as if an electric shock has been transmitted through the telephone wires. The subsequent behaviour of all concerned, the 'umda in particular, is a pleasure to read and provides insight into the workings of the mind of people whose vision of life does not go beyond the simple trivial daily activities confined to the boundaries of their village.

With wit and humour, the author exposes the ignorance and lack of resource of people whose whole existence revolves round planting sugar cane, maize or "clover" and whose pleasures are confined to a monotonous routine of drinking tea boiled until it has become "black as ink" and a few inhalations from the jōza.[4] which each gets in turn, indulging in the meantime in petty talk about the village and the crops.[5] Through comment, action and

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1. Ḥusain Mu'nis, Ahlan wa Sahlan (Cairo, 1958), p.24
2. Ibid., pp. 24-25
3. Ibid., pp. 19-29
4. The jōza is similar to the nārgīlah, except that it generally has a short cane tube instead of a long flexible one. It is used by the lower classes for smoking tobacco and ḥashīsh.
   See E.W.Lane, Manners and Customs, p. 140
5. Ḥusain Mu'nis, op.cit., p.20.

conversation, the author creates a realistic and lively picture of the confusion, mental and physical, that ensues from the announcement of the King's visit. Above all towers the figure of the ʿumda whose disbelief in this news mingles with a secret pride which in turn is dampened by his suspicions of the real intent of such moves by those in power.

Of great importance is the light thrown on the lack of initiative and sense of responsibility at local level. The village represented by the ʿumda is utterly dependent on urban centres for the introduction of any life into it. As everything is issued from Cairo, it is to Cairo that any problem or inquiry is referred, no matter how trivial. Accustomed all his life to enforce orders reaching him through the traditional channels, the mudīr and the maʿmūr from the centre, Cairo, the ʿumda is at a loss as how to react to this piece of news. Thinking and acting independently is something he neither dares nor can do. He sees fit to go to the capital where the people of "tying and untying"[1] are, to seek advice and help.

The novelist exhibits the pyramids of exploitation. From the King downwards, each stratum oppresses the one below and the full weight is felt by the peasant masses. Some of the author's most sardonic passages illustrate Egyptian political ineptitude, administration jobbery and financial robbery, election campaigns and the choice of candidates. King, ministers and deputies all

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1. Ibid., p.57.

play the party game. The political machinary seems to be going round and round in all State departments. Most of the politicians and favoured pashas live lazy, useless and obstructive lives.

In Ahlan wa Sahlan, by cleverly using the device of the "visit by the King" Ḥusain Mu'nis portrayed an almost entire cross section of society. The book abounds in observation and is enriched with irony and humour. The author gives the impression of being completely at home in his world. He renders the contrasts of class, and urban and rural mentality with great skill and delights in the contrast between the character as he sees himself and as he actually is. There is an excellent drawing of the 'umda, a character of mingled cunning and naiveté. But he is only one character in a rich gallery. All are well differentiated. There is 'Abd al-Jalīl, a once unsuccessful Azharite, turned 'umda's assistant, a kind of Sancho Panza; Sharāra, a wonderful study of a rascal; Edward Bailey, the English teacher and seeker of information; Shaikh Zahran, the hardworking, hard up Azharite; the 'umda's brother Muḥammadain, mean and selfish, but loyal to family ties; 'Ajāibī, the simple-minded telephonist and 'Awaḍ the 'umda's naive servant. Through all the characters society is exposed. The descriptions of life in the village are concise and accurate and the episodes shedding light on Cairene life are highly amusing.

One may detect a slight indebtedness to the picaresque novel in the author's technique. The variety of scenes and comic

encounters which together expose the manners of society and lay bare the prevalent weaknesses make delightful reading. All through the novel the reader has the feeling of the author continuously pricking the inflated balloon of society, and enjoying it.

Yūsuf Idrīs (1927-)

In 1959 a third novel on the country people appeared. In al Ḥarām, Yūsuf Idrīs portrays the life of the lowest section of the Egyptian peasants, known throughout the countryside as the tarḥīla or ghrabwa. They are the landless agricultural labourers who are hired for the season and sent to whichever part of the country needs them most, hence their designation 'travellers' or the 'strangers', the latter signifying their being 'outsiders' in relation to the village community or estate on which they have to work.

Al-Ḥarām, was not Yūsuf Idrīs's first literary achievement. He had already published a novel, Qissat Ḥubb (1956), five collections of short stories,[1] and two one act plays.[2] The author's interest in political, social, philosophical and moral questions is reflected to varying degrees in his works, especially in his later writings. The novel that followed al-Ḥarām was al-'Aib. Though it was published in 1962 it will be included in this study as it deals specifically with one of Egypt's important and widespread vices, that of corruption. It will be considered in detail in the chapter on that social evil.

Writing is already making an ever increasing demand on his

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1. Arkhas al-Layālī, 1954; Jumhūriyyat Farḥāt, 1956; al-Baṭal, 1957; Alaysa Kadhālik, 1958; Ḥādithat Sharaf, 1959.
2. Jumhūriyyat Farḥāt and Malik al-Qutn, 1957.

time as a practising doctor.[1] The anatomical quality of his writing reflects the analyst at work. The most minute details and nuances are supported by his knowledge of psychology. In al-Harām, the deplorable condition of the casual wage earners among the peasant population is brought to light. It is the story of the 'temporary hands' whose destitution is exploited by merciless agents who make profits out of recruiting these men and women, and sending them packed in lorries to estates and large farm areas when their labour is needed. Their misery is projected through 'Azīza whose life is one long hard struggle for existence against heavy odds. Her plight is that of a large section of the rural masses existing below the breadline and deprived of any social security.

However, despite the detailed account of the life of the tarhīla in their village or on the estate to which they are transported, al-Harām is not primarily a study of destitution and the hardships man encounters in trying to provide himself and his dependents with a morsel of bread. This is rather the setting against which the author expounds his main theme, which is man's understanding of man achieved only through human suffering and

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1. Yūsuf Idrīs was born in a village in the Sharqiyya province. After finishing his primary and secondary education, he read medicine at Cairo University and graduated in 1951. For three years, he worked in the big government hospital - al-Qaṣr al-'Aini, then was promoted to health inspector in the popular quarter of Darb al-Aḥmar in Cairo. See R. et L. Makarius, Anthologie de la littérature arabe contemporaine, p. 188.

sacrifice. Hence, ʿAzīza's rape, conception, confinement and death through puerperal fever. It is ʿAzīza's heart-rending condition as she lies raving in her fever which finally draws the villagers closer to those "dark haggard looking strangers", whom they regarded until then with suspicion and no little contempt.[1] In the same way, the discovery of a newly born baby strangled near the canal in the village set the ball rolling, and triggers off the fears, doubts, accusations, malicious gossip and latent hatred among the inhabitants of the estate themselves and between them and the unwelcome ghrabwa.

Through a chain of unwarranted incidents, the story is built up to serve the author's moral purpose. The plot is too thin to hold the meaning the author wishes to convey. The chief reason for the novel's effectiveness lies in the realistic picture it presents of the life of the tarḥīla. This will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter. Suffice it to say here that it is a sombre picture, reflecting the drab, poverty-stricken, disease-ridden existence of these people. The few rays of light which break the gloom are provided not by the tarḥīla, but by the administrative staff of the estate and their families.

Most of al-Ḥarām is in direct narrative style, in plain grammatical Arabic. Dialogue which is in the local dialect does not take up much of the story as the author makes little use of the dramatic method. He confines himself to describing the

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1. Yūsuf Idrīs, al-Ḥarām (Cairo, 1965), pp. 109-110.

condition of the tarḥīla instead of allowing them to partake in the action. The thoughts of the main characters like 'Azīza, Fikrī Afandī and Masīḥa Afandi are rendered with accuracy and psychological insight.

Despite the gloom, the author fails in putting the case of the tarḥīla forcefully to the reader. He arouses pity but not anger. To have succeeded in the latter, he would have had to go below the apparent surface of misery. The root-cause of existing bad conditions among the rural masses, whether smallholders or landless agricultural labourers, in al-Ḥarām as well as the two novels formerly discussed is regrettably left untouched. However, al-Ḥarām has the attraction of novelty. It explores new territory in a more literal sense, for it opens up a region which the novel reading public has not previously encountered, that of the million 'outsiders' in their own Egyptian countryside.

Laṭīfa al-Zayyāt (1926-)

In al-Bāb al-Maftūḥ (1960), Laṭīfa al-Zayyāt set out to tell the story of a middle class Egyptian girl and her struggle for emancipation. The girl's fight for recognition as an independent being with a right to decide her own future runs parallel with Egypt's struggle for independence from the British. In both cases, there is a deeply felt desire to get rid of the yoke and achieve freedom. Both themes fuse in the end. The girl breaks free from the domination of her parents and fiancé, the sign of female inferiority, and Egypt acquires its freedom by getting rid of foreign occupation at the end of the Suez War.

Both Iḥsān ʿAbd al-Quddūs and Laṭīfa al-Zayyāt deal with the position of women within the social conventions surrounding them, and woman's reaction to those conventions. But whereas Iḥsān leads his rebel heroine to economic and mental emancipation, Laṭīfa lets her heroine Lailā be crushed by the weight of social conventions after an initial spark of resistance. The difference between the two girls lies in the traits each was endowed with, by her own creator and in the creator's conception of emancipation. Differently conceived, the two girls react differently to the accepted moral code. Lailā, by far the weaker of the two, has her life and actions directed throughout by the male characters in her life. Amīna's actions and decisions are her own. That is why at the end, Amīna's emancipation is complete, not so Lailā's. For though we are told that she has broken her engagement to Dr.

Ramzī, the decision does not in reality spring from her own will and determination. It is not the final culmination of a long process of liberation, but has been brought about by a number of outside factors which leave the reader in doubt as to Lailā's real emancipation, despite the impression the author would like to give.

It is through Lailā that the author deals with major issues concerning the problem of woman in present day Egyptian society. Discrimination is a theme about which the author feels strongly. On several occasions the traditional preference shown by society for the male is stressed. What goes unquestioned for the son is for the daughter either to be weighed with doubt and grave judgement, or utterly prohibited by the average middle class conventional family. The author describes in detail and with feeling, the long lasting harm done to a girl by such attitude.[1] Lailā's emotional and mental life becomes unbalanced. Suppresion of will and individuality turn her into an automaton.[2]

The relationship between the sexes is explored at two levels; the boy and girl relationship and in a more limited manner, husband and wife relationship. Through her heroine the author reflects the impossibility of the growth of a healthy and natural feeling between the sexes. Any attraction towards the other sex is marred by an atmosphere charged with mutual lack of trust

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1. Laṭīfa al-Zayyāt, al-Bāb al-Maftūḥ (Cairo, 1960), pp. 24, 36-37, 44-47.
2. Ibid., p.24

between the sexes, male sexual hunger and, worst of all, constant vigilance by their parents. Lailā's disillusionment with love after her first experience is the outcome of her own immaturity. It illustrates vividly the conflict between dreams of love and the harsh reality reflected in man's sexual urge intensified by social restrictions. However the author carries her heroine's disillusionment to an unwarranted length. Lailā's complete withdrawal within herself, the "light disappearing from her eyes" and later her rejection of Ḥusain's sincere love, are neither justified nor convincing. She becomes merely the means by which the author wishes to illustrate her protest against the deeply rooted conception of love as equated with sexuality and lust, and the prohibitions imposed by society on the sexes, depriving both of ever forming a profound understanding and a true conception of the other sex. The latter point is further elaborated in the relationship of Sanā' and Maḥmūd which is successful because both take each other for what they are and are strong enough to stand by their convictions and resist social conventions.

The relationship of husband and wife is closely connected with the themes of the 'marriage market' and arranged marriages. Laṭīfa al-Zayyāt treats the 'arranged marriage' with sensitivity and realism. She bitterly resents the social custom which gives the parents the right to dispose of their daughter at will according to the accepted values of society, values which assess

a prospective husband according to his means, not his personal merit. The author shows how the middle class exemplified by Lailā's parents, relations and acquaintances fight to preserve their respectability in the social set, sacrificing all other considerations. The failure of the majority of these marriages is stressed. It arises from the incompatibility of the partners. The intellectual disparity between the two leads to unhappiness and tragic results. Through skilfully portraying the failure of Jamīla's marriage, the author attempts to impress upon the reader's mind the great importance of a right matrimonial choice.

The significance of education as an important factor in developing within woman a new concept of self and in offering her a practical means of achieving social and economic independence is stressed by Iḥsān, and is illustrated in the firm determination of his heroine to achieve both. It is not a theme pursued by Laṭīfa. Higher education followed by a profession is presented in the narrative as part of the normal procedure in the life of many a middle class girl, who is allowed to go to the university, not for the inherent value of education but for the prestige attached to a graduate. Thus Lailā does not regard her education or, later, her application for a post as advances towards social and economic freedom as Amīna did. The change that occurs within her by the end of the novel is largely the work of her enlightened friend Sanā'. Lailā's choice of Port Sa'īd, instead of Cairo, as a place of work, against the wishes of her parents

and her fiancé, though made secretly, is the first sign of an active attitude to life after years of passivity. However her awakening to her right to assert herself has come too near the end of the novel to have any tangible effect on the plot. Her final decision, the breaking off of her engagement to Dr. Ramzī, thereby signifying her liberation from the yoke of convention, is a courageous act in itself had it not taken Ḥusain (the man who loves her) and the Suez War to bring it about.

The basic weakness in Lailā as a character and consequently in the novel, stems from the fact that the author overlooks the fundamental reason for woman's inferior position. For though the novel succeeds admirably in portraying society's discrimination against the female and the harmful consequences arising from the application of outdated social values, the link between the prevailing traditions and the economic and social structure is missing. Thus various aspects of the problem of woman are depicted but no fundamental new values are suggested in place of those attacked. To have achieved the desired true emancipation of her heroine as implied in the title of the book, The Open Door, a more radical outlook would have been necessary in respect of tradition and emphasis would have had to be placed on economic independence. As it stands, despite a much greater psychological realism, it leaves the problem of woman essentially unsolved.

The reader is aware of the author's diligence in constructing the novel. Words and phrases are selected to convey additional

subtleties of meaning and intensification of mood. The speed of events is cleverly related to the feelings of the characters. When Lailā feels oppressed, her thoughts and activities are described in detail and the heaviness somehow passes on to the reader. When she is happy and carefree, her conversation and the relevant descriptive passage are bubbling with life. Moreover Laṭīfa al-Zayyāt makes frequent use of symbolism in her novel. The passages describing the "marshes", or the "mud", the "ripples" and the"waves", the "coffee stain on the carpet" and the "broken doll" all embody a more profound meaning in regard to characters and events. Very effective is the cinematographic technique she sometimes uses, for example, the alternation between Lailā and 'Iṣām's conversation at the door of the big store and the remarks of a customer to a friend in the background. They speak of utterly different subjects but, seen against one another, the political and social themes conjoin. However, there are certain recurrent mannerisms of style which leave an impression of theatricality rather than of lifelike reactions and gestures. Throughout the novel the reader encounters several times "the smile that freezes" and "the hand that remains suspended in mid air" without adding any real significance to the course of events. Nor can any symbolism be read into them.

These and other faults of characterization, especially where Lailā and Husain are concerned, may be the result of the author's conventional outlook despite her resentment and her

attack on social taboos. As for Ḥusain, he is not solid enough to bear the weight of the rôle the author wishes him to play. He is rather the typical hero, the dream of the woman who looks for gallantry, kindness and understanding in man, appearing and disappearing according to the author's wish. Nonetheless, al-Bāb al-Maftūḥ deals with a major problem with deadly seriousness and is a worthy contribution to the modern Egyptian novel.

CHAPTER II

Distribution of Wealth

PART I

The Poor

Introduction

In an article on conditions in Egypt entitled Indhār ʿAlī al-Ṭanṭāwī called in question the structure of a society where there was such a wide gulf between the upper and lower classes.

> "What is this disparity between the people in Egypt? What a situation is this, in which one person owns a million and a million own nothing; a thousand working for one man and the man does no work; a human being believing himself a god because of wealth and grandeur, and people regarding themselves as beasts because of poverty and degradation."[1]

According to Issawi, it is impossible to measure the distribution of income in Egypt because of the 'paucity of data'. But his rough estimate for the pre-war period shows the great inequality which struck even the most casual visitor. About half of the land was owned by less than 21,000 persons. The bulk of bank deposits belonged to about one-tenth of the total number of

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1. ʿAlī al-Ṭanṭāwī, "Indhār", al-Risāla, No. 15, p. 668. Quoted by Anīs Khūrī al-Maqdisī, al-Ittijāhāt al-Adabiyya fī al-ʿĀlam al-ʿArabī al-Hadīth (Beirut, 1963), p. 228.

depositors while the share capital hold locally was owned by not more than 10,000 persons. 18,000 persons owned buildings representing 58 per cent of the total value of taxed property.[1] Moreover, there was much overlapping between these categories. As for the post-war period, the severe inflation experienced by Egypt during the Second World War, further accentuated the already vast inequality in the distribution of wealth.[2]

Any study of the country's distribution of wealth before the change of régime in 1952 must inevitably lead to consideration of the system of land tenure, since it was the distribution of landed property that "seriously impeded Egyptian economic development".[3] Because in a country like Egypt where 70 per cent of the total population is rural, the "tenure system determines not only the basic economic laws of the nation but the social laws as well".[4] The prevalence of "institutional monopoly" in landownership, linked with a monopolistic supply of capital to agriculture led to an extremely unequal distribution of land. While a small group of large landowners owned more than half the land, three quarters of the 4 million actively occupied in agriculture did not own as much as one acre.[5] Since the minimum a

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1. For further details see C. Issawi, Egypt at Mid-Century, pp. 84-85.
2. Ibid., p. 85.
3. G. Baer, A History of Landownership, p. 201.
4. Saad M. Gadalla , Land Reform in Relation to Social development, Egypt (Columbia, 1962), p. 8.
5. D. Warriner, Land Reform and Development, p. 6.
   For details on the distribution of landownership see D. Warriner, Land and Poverty in the Middle East, pp. 34-35, 37; also C. Issawi, Egypt at Mid-Century, p. 126.

farmer requires for existence on a standard level, which though low can be considered adequate, should be between 2 1/2 and 5 acres,[1] Miss Warriner's statement that "there is no standard of living"[2] is valid. Moreover, the distribution of landownership mentioned above did not reflect the full extent of the inequality. In addition to the 2 3/4 million small landholders, there were about 1 1/2 million families of landless farm workers. They lived by sharecropping on small areas of land or by casual labour.[3]

Since the poverty of the masses, considered the "basic problem of Egypt"[4] was intimately connected with the land tenure system, some picture of how this system originated and developed must be given. Until 1805 the Ottoman Sultan was at one and the same time owner of all state property and private landowner. Muḥammad ʿAlī and his dynasty transformed land from state property into individually owned private property.[5] As there was no clear-cut distinction between the ruler's estates and state land,

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1. H.H.Ayrout, The Egyptian Peasant (Boston, 1963), p.16.
2. D. Warriner, Land and Poverty, p.38.
3. D. Warriner, Land reform and development, p.25; also Baer, Population and Society, pp. 151, 144; Issawi, Egypt at Mid-Century, p.240.
4. D. Warriner, Land and Poverty, p.44;
5. "Up to the nineteenth century the ownership of all land in Egypt was vested in the state, except for land granted as rizqa. Since the state and the ruler were identical, the ruler ipso facto, owned most of the land. On the whole he did not have extensive private estates, differentiated from state owned land." See Baer, Landownership, p.40.

the latter was at the ruler's disposal. Large areas of land were 'granted' by the rulers as owners of state land to themselves as private landlords. The ruling family's landholding increased remarkably under Khedive Ismā'īl. Owning no more than a few thousand faddans at the beginning of his reign, he and his family held 916,000 acres by 1878,[1] when the state acquired the property to pay part of Ismā'īl's enormous debts.[2] However, the Muḥammad 'Alī family managed through 'clever administration' to remain the largest landowners in Egypt until 1952 when the old regime was overthrown, and the property of the royal family expropriated.[3]

The multazims, or tax collectors, the virtual rulers of the Egyptian countryside under Ottoman rule, were liquidated by Muḥammad 'Alī. Other groups emerged as big landowners in the course of the nineteenth century. Besides taking over land for themselves the ruling family bestowed large areas of state land on senior officials who proved their worth in administering the realm.[4] Large estates were also formed by grants of uncultivated land made to persons with economic and political power, on condition that the land was brought under cultivation.[5] From 1880

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1. Ibid., p. 41.
2. Ibid., p. 44.
3. D. Warriner, Land reform and development, p. 14. King Fu'ād increased his property from 800 faddans in 1917 to 28,000 in 1936. Farūq, his son, and successor, owned not less than 28,109 acres at the time of his abdication, 1952. See Baer, Landownership, p. 135.
4. Baer, Landownership, pp. 45-46.
5. The total cultivated area expanded by 70 per cent during the nineteenth century and most of it has been acquired by landlords. See Warriner, Land and Poverty, pp. 49-50.

onwards the state sold about 1¼ million faddans of land to buyers who were mostly from the emerging class of wealthy urban dwellers as well as foreigners and land companies.[1] These sales were the origin of the large estates existing in Egypt at the time of the agrarian reform.[2] Economic power came to be concentrated in the hands of a few very large landowners. The Organic Law of 1913 placed the native government apparatus firmly in the hands of that small well-to-do section of the population, thereby giving it political power.[3] By granting wide legislative and executive powers to the King, the biggest landowner, and providing for the rule of large landowners in the Senate, the 1923 Constitution further consolidated the political power of the landlords. It also facilitated the occupation of the most influential positions in the Chamber of Deputies and in all political parties by landowners.[4]

The concentration of economic and political power in the hands of the large landowners frustrated any social and economic legislation and prevented social development projects.[5] The condition of the very small farm holder and that of the tenant became very depressed as rents were maintained at a high level or raised, while farm wages were kept low.[6] On large estates where part of

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1. Baer, Landownership, pp. 120-121.
2. Baer, Population and Society in the Near East, p. 145.
3. J.N.D. Anderson, "Law Reform in Egypt: 1850-1950", Political and Social Progress in Modern Egypt, ed. by P.M. Holt, p. 219
4. Baer, Landownership, p. 201.
5. Baer, Population and Society, p. 151.
6. Before the second world war rents amounted to £E4 per acre on newly reclaimed land, and to £E10 per acre in the congested districts; during the second world war rents rose rapidly and in the Asyut district, by 1943 amounted to £E25 per acre. D. Warriner, Land and Poverty, p. 36.

the land was rented out the "rents charged were in some cases higher than the net output from the land operated by the owner. This shows that tenants in Egypt frequently are little better off than agricultural labourers."[1] These conditions led to the dispossession of a large number of peasants, whose land was seized for payment of debts incurred at exorbitant rates of interest.[2] They joined the great mass of landless agricultural labourers.

The natural increase in population without a corresponding increase in land,[3] despite very intensive cultivation, resulted in a further decline in the 'standard of living' of the masses. Any attempt at raising the standard of living presupposes either an "enormous expansion in production or a reduction in the population."[4] Industry could to some extent check the fall in the standard of living as it would provide alternative employment. However, "without the rise in rural incomes there could be no expansion of demand for industrial goods and no expansion of industry, which is necessary if the 'surplus' is to be absorbed in other occupation."[5] Moreover, as long as the bulk of the

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1. From an article by Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Wahhāb ʿIzzat in al-Hayāt, Karachi, 1952, quoted by Issawi, Egypt at Mid-Century.p.128.
2. Baer, Population and Society, p.144. The rate of interest charged by moneylenders who were financed by various banks was from 30 to 40 per cent. Elinor Burns, British Imperialism in Egypt (London, 1928), p.49; also H. Ayrout, op.cit.,pp.24, 57.
3. There has been no new land since the 1930s. Land reclamation was stopped during the war and has only recently been resumed. D. Warriner, Land reform and development, p.19.
4. C. Issawi, Egypt at Mid-Century, p.242.
5. D. Warriner, Land and Poverty, p.31; on the extent of the solution provided by industrialization see C. Issawi, Egypt at Mid-Century, p.243.

population continues to depend on agriculture, the class structure will be "dominated by a small group of large landowners on theone hand and a large mass of wretched peasants and farm labourers on the other."[1]

The need for industrialization began to be realized in Egypt during the First World War. For a variety of reasons little was done in the nineteen-twenties. Only after the 'Customs Reform Act' of 1930 did industrial activity increase.[2] But it was the Second World War with the large scale expenditure of Allied troops stationed in Egypt, which greatly stimulated industry.[3] It also accelerated migration to the towns by offering more opportunities for employment. However, this drift to the towns from the 'surplus' rural population resulted in a large reserve of unemployed who depressed wages and handicapped the improvement of workers' conditions. For employers were in a strong bargaining position as long as the industrial labour market continued to be flooded by cheap rural labour.[4] Thus the low rural standard of living, caused by the land tenure system, affected the workers' wages and social legislation, rendering a reform of land distribution imperative.

It was the war which highlighted the seriousness of the poverty of the masses. Wages did not keep up with the rising

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1. Issawi, Egypt at Mid-Century, p.179.
2. Ibid., p.141
3. Some 200,000 Egyptians of whom 80,000 were skilled or semi-skilled workmen were employed in the British Army workshops or camps. Ibid.
4. Ibid., p.251.

cost of living and severe inflation caused much suffering. The gap between rich and poor was further enlarged. The rural masses and the unskilled urban labourers suffered severe privations. The salaried lower middle class, whose money incomes rose very little, were relentlessly pressed down.[1] The gravity of the situation was reflected in the malaria epidemic in Upper Egypt which carried off thousands of victims in the 1940s, who were too weak to resist, because of near starvation. Blame for the poverty of Qena and Aswan districts was laid on the "concentration of property in the hands of great landowners."[2] The distribution of landed property could no longer be ignored or disregarded. "Without a reform of the land tenure system," wrote Miss Warriner, "it is impossible to look for any improvement in their /the peasants'/ condition since, in spite of the general improvement in the economic position of agriculture during the war, they have not derived any benefit."[3]

For the first time the agrarian question became a subject of public discussion. In the late thirties books were published on the economic, social and political problems of the country without so much as mentioning the land question or land reform. Dr. Ḥafiz ʿAfīfī, in his book ʿAlā Ḥāmish al-Siyāsa, though

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1. Ibid., p.262.
2. Baer, Landownership, p.202. In a speech on the malaria epidemic by the Prime Minister Muṣṭafā al-Naḥḥās in 1944.
3. D. Warriner, Land and Poverty, p.40.

referring to the "very low standard of living" as "about four million people live on an income of less than one pound (£E1) per month", and "five and a half million on not more than £E3 per month",[1] sees the solution in an attempt to increase the national wealth, and discusses ways and means of improving "our agricultural resources."[2] Likewise, Bint al-Shāṭi', in her book Qadiyyat al-Fallāh, declaring the problem of the peasant even more grave "than the question of independence", seeks only to help him regain his legal rights to "a simple modest life."[3] The means of achieving this aim she sees in "awakening the human conscience"[4] and arousing the "feeling of pity" in the rich towards the miserable cultivators of the soil.[5] The reason she gives for the improvement of the peasants' condition is "so that he could increase his output, whereby the wealth of the landowners grows."[6]

A change in outlook occurred during the war years and was directly connected with the social problems created by the war Muḥammad Khaṭṭāb writes of the growing disparity between rich and poor and the menace it represents to the whole social structure that it "does not bode well for the future of the country."[7]

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1. Ḥāfiẓ ʿAfīfī, ʿAlā Hāmish al-Siyāsa (Cairo, 1938), pp. 165-166.
2. Ibid., pp. 167-168. Also Mirrit Ghālī in The Policy of Tomorrow proposes the expansion of cultivable area and the improvement of productivity. Ghālī, The Policy of Tomorrow, p. 54
3. Ibnat al-Shāṭi', Qadiyyat al-Fallāh (Cairo, 1938), pp. 'ya', 'ha'.
4. Ibid., in the dedicatory note.
5. Ibid., p.186.
6. Ibid., p.184.
7. M. Khaṭṭāb, "Āfāq Jadīda fī al-Siyāsa al-Miṣriyya", al-Ahram, 5 March, 1943.

At the end of 1944 he laid before the Senate a Bill to limit the size of agricultural landholdings to 50 faddans. Mirrit Ghālī points out that the increased profits of the landowner and the fall in income of the small tenant and the workers constitute a "problem which can no longer be ignored".[1] He states that this trend heightened public interest in the question of the redistribution of landed property. Ṣādiq Sa'd sees that the hardships brought about by the war have made people "aware of the faults in our social structure and compelled them to give some consideration to their remedy - not superficial stop-gap measures, but thorough-going reform."[2]

Remedy in the form of land reform was advocated by a few individuals. Limitation of the size of large estates was proposed by some. Others insisted on the confiscation of large estates and their redistribution among the peasants.[3] Needless to say both measures were unacceptable to the political parties and met with great opposition. Muḥammad 'Alī 'Allūba Pasha expressed the prevailing opinions within not only his party (Liberal Constitutionalists) but the other parties as well. He stated that land reform "is not the way to extricate Egypt from its distressing situation." He argued that the "breaking up of private estates and their redistribution would not produce the

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1. M. Ghālī, al-Iṣlāḥ al-Zirā'ī (Cairo, n.d.), pp. 11ff.
2. Ṣādiq Sa'd, Mushkilat al-Fallāḥ (Cairo, n.d.), pp. 7-8.
3. For detailed study on the policy of the parties towards the land question, see Baer, Landownership, pp. 205ff.

benefits expected of it."[1] They adopted the individualistic philosophy which argued in favour of safeguarding the "freedom of the individual and his initiative" supporting it with the all-purpose cliché, "our country is a democracy."[2] Though land reform was recognized as a social necessity not "one measure was passed for the benefit of the fellahin on whom Egypt's economy depends", in the 30 years of parliamentary government.[3] Limitation of property, limitation of inheritance, minimum wages, social services imposed upon landowners, were some of the many schemes which lay untouched in the files[4]. Bills were introduced in 1945 and 1950 for the limitation of the size of the holdings. They were "overwhelmingly defeated."[5]

It was only with the change of régime that an Agrarian Reform law was put into force on 7th September 1952.[6] Writers differ in their assessment of the improvement brought about by the land reform. It is agreed that improvement in the living conditions of the rural population has been "partly attained".[7] An official statement puts the increase of incomes of farm tenants at 50 per cent above the 1951/52 level.[8] This has to be considered

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1. M. 'Alī 'Allūba, Mabādi' fī al-Siyāsa al-Miṣriyya (Cairo, 1942), pp. 51-52, 67.
2. Ibid., p. 52.
3. D. Warriner, Land Reform and Development, p. 11.
4. H. Ayrout, op. cit., p. 16.
5. Issawi, Egypt at Mid-Century, p. 135.
6. D. Warriner, Land Reform and Development, p. 12; G. Baer. Population and Society, pp. 155-156.
7. Issawi, Egypt in Revolution, p. 162.
8. "Replies to United Nations Questionnaires", p. 8, quoted by D. Warriner, Land Reform, p. 39.

against a rise of 10-15 per cent in the cost of living as Saab points out.[1] However, this 'improvement' was confined to a large extent to the tenant-labourers as a result of rent reductions, and to the beneficiaries of redistribution.[2] A rough estimate of the distribution of income in 1958 indicates that the richest 4 per cent obtain about 32% of the national gross income whilst 87 per cent of the population draws only 27% of the annual gross income. That means that £E827.4 per capita obtained by the rich is set against a £E12.2 per capita received by the poor,[3] or that a rich man's yearly income is about 69 times as much as that of a poor person.

Exploitation

At the root of the sharp disequilibrium of income lay the continuous exploitation of the masses throughout the centuries by the ruling class. The extent of this exploitation may be realized by reckoning the amount of human labour which went into the erection of the Pyramids of Giza at the time of the Pharaohs.[4]

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1. Gabriel Saab, The Egyptian Agrarian Reform, 1952-1962 (London, 67).
2. Issawi, Egypt in Revolution, p.162; also D. Warriner, Land reform, pp. 33, 35, 37.
3. "Distribution of Income, 1958", Tiers-Monde, July-Sept. 1960 and April-June 1961, quoted by Issawi., Egypt in Revolution, p.120.
4. According to an estimate by an American civil engineer the labour cost of the 3 million cubic yards of the Great Pyramid was about 400 man-hours per cubic yard. This compares with some 3 man-hours per cubic yard for a modern concrete structure such as the Grand Coulee dam (New York Times, 5 October 1952), quoted by Issawi, Egypt at Mid-Century, p.7.

Conditions under later rulers showed no improvement. Travellers and historians throughout the centuries refer to the oppression of the people and their appalling poverty.[1] Since the source of Egypt's wealth throughout has been the yield of the soil produced by the peasant, it was he who suffered most from political oppression and intensive exploitation. Under the Ottomans, the system of Iltizām exhausted and exploited the farmer to such a degree that Volney travelling through the country in 1784 saw peasants "to whom no more is left than barely suffices to sustain life... a universal appearance of wretchedness and misery... hideous rags, and disgusting nudities... Nothing is talked of but intestine troubles, the public misery, pecuniary extortions, bastinadoes and murders. There is no security for life or property."[2] The condition of peasants does not appear to have

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1. Patriarch Dionysius wrote after his visit to Egypt in A.D. 815, on passing through the textile centre of Tinnis, "I have never seen a people so poor. On asking them they said... 'our wives spin the flax and we weave it all day long. The government buyers and the merchant give us half a dirham a day for wages. This is not enough to feed our dogs. We pay a tax of five dinars (100 dirhams) a year each. If we can't pay it, we are put in prison, and our wives and children are held as hostages. For every dinar we cannot pay, we are made slaves for two years.'" Quoted in M.M.Musharrafa, Cultural Survey of Modern Egypt (London, 1947), pt. 2, p.44. Cadalvène summed up the history of Egypt in his gloomy statement: "Étrange spectacle que celui de l'Égypte, de cette terre qui semble ne devoir nourrir que des oppresseurs et des opprimés." Quoted by C. Issawi, Egypt at Mid-Century, p.8.
2. C. F. De Volney, Travels through Syria and Egypt in the years 1783, 1784, 1785 trans. (London, 1787), vol. I, pp. 188-190.

changed under Muḥammad ʿAlī. Though he brought order to the country after centuries of strife by destroying the military power of the Mamluks and liquidating the multazims,[1] he imposed conscription and the corvée and the burden of taxation often forced cultivators to abandon their land.[2]

Ismāʿīl's policy of the Europeanization of Egypt led to a rise in taxation to an exorbitant level,[3] in order to meet the payment of interest which French and British bondholders insisted on.[4] No postponement was allowed, though The Times reported in 1879 that taxes were being collected at the same time that "people are dying by the roadside, that great tracts of country are uncultivated because of the fiscal burdens and that the farmers have sold their cattle and the women their finery and that the usurers are filling the mortgage offices with their bonds and the courts

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1. When the emins (the salaried agents of Ottoman governors) sought to administer the numerous muqāṭaʿas given them by the Treasury, through agents called ʿāmils, mainly recruited from former tax-farmers (sing. multazim). The multazims paid a fixed annual sum to the emins and kept the balance of tax collections to themselves as a profit. They became the virtual rulers of the countryside when Ottoman officials could no longer control the Mamluks in the late seventeeth century. Their heavy hand bore down oppressively on the peasant population who were left with "the bare minimum needed for them to survive and they fell into deeper and deeper misery and subjection." S. J. Shaw, "Landholding and Land-tax Revenues",in Social and Political Change, ed. Holt, p.94.
2. C. Issawi, Egypt at Mid-Century, p.24.
3. Ibid., p.24.
4. On July 21, 1877 The Times called on the British Controller General "not to forget the fellaheen in his zeal for the creditors, or he may one day overstep the limits of productiveness", quoted by Elinor Burns, op.cit., p.7.

with their suits of foreclosure."[1] 'Abdallāh Nadīm in his article in al-Tā'if described many an atrocity he witnessed while on his travels in the country. On one of these occasions he describes how he saw the ma'mūr enter the village on his tax collecting round whipping even those who paid their share. The one who could not pay was tied to a post and the whip would "tear his skin to the bone". The few who survived were thrown into jail.[2] In the early twentieth century we hear Adīb Isḥāq, a naturalized Egyptian of Syrian origin, deploring the condition of the peasant who is torn "between a shaikh who orders him and an 'umda who prohibits him, a ma'mūr who plunders him, a governor who whips him and a minister who deals with his money according to his (the minister's) whim." He concludes the passage by stating that the peasant derives no benefit at all despite the hard toil and the abundance of crops.[3]

The development of cotton during the nineteenth century had far reaching effects on the country's economic policy. It brought Egypt into the current of international trade, subjecting her agricultural policy to the world market. This led to her traditional subsistence economy being replaced by the growing of cash crops, and necessitated an expansion in the cultivated area,

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1. Quoted by Elinor Burns, ibid., p. 7. Wilfred Blunt, writing about the same time, tells of the plight of the peasants "who were in terrible straits of poverty. The provincial towns on market days were full of women, selling their clothes and their silver ornaments to the Greek usurers, because the tax collectors were in the villages, whips in hand." W.S. Blunt, Secret History, pp. 11-12.
2. 'Abdallāh Nadīm, al-Tā'if (periodical, Cairo, 1881-1882), 6.5.1882.
3. Quoted in an article by H. 'Ammār, "Mawqif al-Fallāḥ al-Miṣrī min al-Sulṭa, al-Hilāl No. 5, 1965, p. 101.

which was dependent on the extension of irrigation. By the introduction into Egypt in the later part of the nineteenth century of the system of perennial irrigation an extraordinarily high level of output came to be achieved with the all-year-round farming.[1] Besides the land's increased yield and the extension of the area of cultivated land, the new irrigation system brought about what almost amounted to a social upheaval in the life of the rural masses. It lengthened and intensified the peasant's work and made him more than ever before dependent for his livelihood on the orders of a government whose agricultural operations and cropping plans were devised in the interests of the small section of large landowners it represented. He could neither plant what he wished nor when he wished. Whether day labourer, tenant farmer, share-cropper or even landowner, he had no say in regard to irrigation dates, seeds, or choice of crops.[2]

The complete control of the government over the agricultural policy of the country is reflected in the novels portraying life and conditions in the countryside. In al-Ard we see how Diyāb, who farms the small land he and his brother own, is at a loss as to what to do next with the land. His brother who "knows everything" has just left for Cairo. He is the one who works out when the land needs to lie fallow and when it is to be ploughed.

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1. For details see Ayrout, op. cit., pp. 28, 58 .
2. Ibid., p. 58.

He knows when to irrigate the plot near the bridge and when to water the section (hawd) by the canal.[1] Diyāb's total dependence on his literate brother indicates the latter's obedience to the government's orders concerning cultivation.

The peasant's helplessness and utter reliance on the government is nowhere so evident as in the question of irrigation. Ever since the modern system of irrigation was constructed in the late nineteenth century, the government has come to control all cultivated land, establish the order of rotation in each crop zone and supervise dikes and canals.[2] In a number of illuminating scenes in al-Ard government control of irrigation is shown to be at the root of the growing tension in the village. The villagers learn to their utter dismay that the irrigation rota for that period has been reduced to "five days" instead of the original ten.[3] Their anger is roused on finding out that this order does not apply to the land of the pasha nearby. The iniquity of the situation is highlighted when they are accused by the ʿumda of "theft" if they were to break the order and irrigate their dry land beyond the permitted five days. The ʿumda makes it clear that the "laws... consider irrigation outside the appointed dates a crime... a crime of theft."[4] Matters come to

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1. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sharqāwi, al-Ard, p.159.
2. H. Ayrout, op.cit., p.28.
3. ʿA. R. al-Sharqāwi, op.cit., p.67.
4. Ibid., p.109.

a head when in their helplessness and frustration they vent their rising feelings on those nearest to them, not being able to avenge themselves on the high and mighty. Sticks and clubs are wielded by all against all. In the name of "defending the life of the soil, life itself, every peasant dealt blow after blow against anyone who contested the right of the land to water."[1] Their concerted attempt to solve the question peacefully is foiled. The petition they so laboriously prepared is replaced by a different one by Mahmūd Bey, the rich landowner who is entrusted on account of his postion, with presenting it to those in charge in Cairo. The villagers contemplate how their lives and that of the plants are at the mercy of one man.[2]

Poverty, isolation and ignorance have rendered the peasant an easy target for exploitation by the powerful and rich. The overwhelming weight of the government machine is concentrated for the peasants in the hands of the mudīr, the ma'mūr and the 'umda. However, it is the 'umda into whose hands the peasants are "delivered". He is the 'master' who in the majority of cases knows "as little of municipal government as of civic justice".[3] The 'umda, as the government's representative in the village, is anxious to comply with its wishes in order to further his own interests, usually at the expense of the peasants. The 'umda's

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1. Ibid., p. 178.
2. Ibid., pp. 83-86, 138, 188.
3. H. Ayrout, op. cit., p. 32.

connivance with those in power for the benefit of both parties is amply stressed in al-Ard. He is a man "who knows how to live at all times."[1] His whole concern is to carry out government orders no matter what they are. As to what may befall the village people as a result of these orders "that does not concern him at all."[2] We are told how he sent many peasants to the markaz to be tortured when "they boycotted the elections for a government by the Sha'b Party, and when they declined to pay the land tax.[3] The author comments drily that when the 'umda is not sure of the "colour" of a government, he depends on God to guide him.[4] By supporting the pasha's request for a new road to be constructed near his mansion, the 'umda reveals his dishonest character. He tricks the peasants into "signing" or "stamping each with his ownseal" what can only be interpreted as a "destruction warrant" of his own small plot of land.[5] All the desperate efforts of the peasants to prevent the 'disaster' when they learn of the trick, are of no avail. They are told that "it is futile to object", so long as the government is determined to construct the road.[6]

Another episode illustrates to what length the 'umda goes, under the pretext of performing his functions. Khadra's death is attributed to the innocent 'Alwānī, in order to get rid of him.[7]

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1. 'A.R.al-Sharqāwī, al-Ard, p. 108.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid., p.189.
6. Ibid., p.303.
7. Ibid., p.304.

Muḥammad Abū Swailem is wrongly accused of having tampered with the water and is sent to the markaz to be punished.[1] Friends are thrown against each other and village girls are slandered,[2] all in an attempt to break the solidarity of the village and find out the peasants' intentions or plans, if any, against the government.[3]

The inhuman treatment of the villagers by those representing the government is further illustrated in the conduct of the ma'mūr towards them. He orders them to be whipped, and tortured for having disobeyed the government order on irrigation. Muḥammad Abū Swailem feels that had he been a horse owned by the government "they would have shown more pity". Were the ma'mūr to act as he did with a dog or a cat he would have been condemned by his superiors and friends. The many societies for the care of animals might have demanded his imprisonment. But in their (the peasants') case, his wife might even be proud of what he did.[4]

In al-Ḥarām exploitation of the poorest and the lowest section of peasants is portrayed. They are the landless farm labourers who rely on wages as their only form of income. For five or six weeks a year they are recruited to work on large estates, picking cotton, or examining the cotton leaves for any cotton worm, or at the gin. We accompany Fikrī Afandī, the 'overseer' of the taftīsh (in the greatest estates different services are grouped in a taftīsh, or

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1. Ibid., p. 217.
2. Ibid., p. 307.
3. Ibid., pp. 314-315.
4. Ibid., pp. 276-277.

inspectorate, installed in the 'izba) to one of the "many villages he knows" and the "many agents" he does business with, in order to recruit a number of temporary hands needed on the 'izba.[1] The poverty of those numerous landless, unemployed, agricultural labourers is exploited by both overseer and agent. First they haggle over the wages between them. When this is finally settled at nine piastres for each 'hand', the agent then takes almost a third of the meagre pay. The labourer gets only six piastres of the original nine.[2] On the estate all semblance of humanity goes, they are regarded merely as 'hands' and are organized in gangs working under the stern eye of the gangleader who follows them with a stick in hand. The slightest stoppage of work despite the long hours is met with abuse or the stick.[3] A similar picture is drawn by Ḥusain Haykal in Zainab. The agricultural labourers here, besides the low wages they receive, are not even paid on time by the clerk. First he tells them that there will be no pay before market day. Later he tries to talk himself out of paying by stating that he is "out of cash."[4] The authorities did not supervise labour conditions in any way and agricultural labour enjoyed no protective legislation. When the Labour Law was promulgated in 1942 to legalize trade unions,

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1. Yūsuf Idrīs, al-Ḥarām, p. 18.
2. Ibid., p. 19.
3. Ibid., pp. 32, 33.
4. Ḥusain Haykal, Zainab, pp. 15-17.

the agricultural labourers were not included in the provisions of the Law, because "according to the rapporteur who introduced it, their inconclusion would open the door to communism."[1] Thus we learn in the same novel that Khalīl Abū Jabr will get 18 piastres for six days' work, whereas ʿAṭiyya Abū Faraj will only be paid 6 piastres because he was ill most of the week. The fact that he is responsible for a wife, a small daughter and a helpless mother is of no consequence.[2] The same treatment goes for ʿAzīza in al-Ḥarām. Absent from work for two days because of high temperature, the overseer asks for her wages to be cut, regardless of the fact that she is the only wage earner in a family of five.[3]

An incident related by Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī in his book Khallīha ʿAlā Allāh of which he had personal knowledge in his capacity as assistant administrator at a headquarters in Manfalūṭ in 1927, throws light on the extent of the exploitation of the peasant by those in power and is relevant to the subject. A law was promulgated at that time to limit the area of cultivation of cotton to one third of the surface area of each plot. Farmers had already sown their grain and the cotton was green when the law was implemented. Ḥaqqī as an official was obliged to enforce the law.

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1. D. Warriner, Land and Poverty in the Middle East, p. 38.
2. H. Haykal, op. cit., p. 17.
3. Yūsuf Idrīs, op. cit., pp. 82-83.

A group of policemen accompanied him, uprooting the plants in excess of the stipulated quota. The peasants' begging and pleading to spare the cotton went unheeded. Not being able to do anything, but aware of their misery, their destitution and fatigue and their helplessness in opposing the unjust order of the government, he tried to circumvent the rigid terms of the law by calculating the sides of the trenches and the ditches, which are barren, as part of the whole plot. However the irony and cruelty of this incident is reflected in the climax. The farmers whose livelihood had thus been destroyed were asked by the _'umda_ to pay for the kerosene which was being used to burn their own uprooted cotton stalks.[1]

Cotton as has already been pointed out played a vital rôle in strengthening the power of the landlords and subsequently the existing system, as it has been the main source of the landlord's wealth. The popularity of cotton is attributable not only to its high value in the world market but also to the fact it could not be consumed by peasants and thus "admirably suits absentee landlords."[2] Moreover, the poverty of the peasant and the cheapness of labour because of the surplus of 'hands' made cotton an exceptionally profitable crop to grow.

The importance of cotton to the landowner is best reflected in the careful watch kept on every cotton plant, branch

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1. Yahya Haqqi, _Khalliha 'Ala Allah_ (Cairo, n.d.), pp. 150-152.
2. C. Issawi, _Egypt at Mid-Century_, p.111.

by branch and leaf by leaf, for fear of destruction by the worm. Yūsuf Idrīs in al-Harām illustrates how this fear becomes an obsession with the overseer. Fikrī Afandī "fears the worm more than death" we are told. He knows for certain that if the worm attacks the cotton, his future will be completely destroyed, as that of the cotton boll. The landowner will not hesitate to dismiss him for lack of vigilance. Fikrī Afandī even sees a strong link between his moral cleanliness and his success in eliminating the disaster. Were he to commit the least of sins, God will certainly "let loose hundreds of these black crawling devils to torment him."[1]

Cotton is just as important a crop to the small farmholder as it is to the big landowner, despite all the restrictions imposed upon him from above and his dependence on generally unscrupulous intermediaries when selling it. Nevertheless, "the face of the peasant lights up with joy when the cotton sprouts",[2] writes Haykal in Zainab. He sees in it the "omnipotent", the "solver of all difficulties".[3] A typical statement made by the peasant when facing any problem is "when we sell the cotton God will solve it."[4] The author observes that "many a dire problem is kept at a standstill waiting for the cotton to be sold."[5] Seldom is an issue

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1. Y. Idrīs, op. cit., p. 77.
2. Ḥ. Haykal, Zainab, p. 58.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., p. 70.
5. Ibid., p. 58.

in the life of a peasant free from "the might of this overpowering tyrant."[1] ʿAbd al-Hādī in al-Ard is filled with joy and hope as he sees the white cotton in bloom. He intends to gather it "in a few weeks time in order to sell it to one of the foreigners who visit the village in the cotton seasons. When he receives the money he "will pay Wasīfa's bride money (mahr) and marry."[2]

The despair of the peasant when through an arbitrary order of government his plot of land planted with cotton is seized, is great, as indicated earlier. Muhammad Abū Swailem in al-Ard in a heart rending plea asks the sergeant who comes to see that the government's order is carried out, to let him gather his cotton before the feet and axes of the workers destroy it. When his plea goes unheeded he attacks the sergeant and almost strangles him.[3] The importance of cotton in the peasants' life is dangerous when there is a bad year. They are left at the mercy of the landlords, profiteers and brokers. Not so the landlords. To offset the effect of the fall in cotton prices in the nineteen thirties the Government imposed prohibitive tariffs on wheat and maize in the interests of the landlords. For the large section of the farm population which depends on wages, this meant that

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1. Ibid.
2. ʿA. R. al-Sharqāwī, al-Ard, p.308.
3. Ibid.

the cost of living was raised at the same time as their wages were cut in half.[1] Moreover, landlords used their power very selfishly, taking full advantage of their knowledge of price fluctuations in dealings with tenants.[2]

Because of the very limited land resources the pressure of the population, and the absence of alternative employment, land was in great demand and thus nearly always let at high prices. The result was, that by the time the peasant had paid the rent for the land, the loans he contracted for seed, in a good year, he had just enough left over for his family to eat;[3] otherwise if there was a sharp fall in the price of cotton the tenant cultivator had no choice but to abandon his crop to the landlord and fall into debt.

Owning land is "every fellah's ideal".[4] The significance it has for him is well illustrated in al-Ard. ʿAbd al-Hādī, the hardworking young peasant views his little plot with pride and deep emotion. It gives him a feeling of stability, of self-respect. He keeps reminding himself that he owns one faddan, "a

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1. D. Warriner, Land and Poverty, p.32. Referring to the effects of the slump, Issawi agrees with the truth of a statement made by an agriculturist that "the Egyptian working classes have performed the miracle of accepting without resistance a 50 per cent reduction of money wages." S. Avigdor in Bulletin de l'Union des Agriculteurs, June-July 1932. Quoted by Issawi, Egypt at Mid-Century, p.131.
2. C. Issawi, Egypt at Mid-Century, p.128.
3. For details see Ayrout, op.cit., pp. 55-56.
4. Ibid., p.57.

faddan all in one piece."[1] He knows that he is "one of ten men in the village who own as much or more."[2] Even the 'umda "does not possess more" and had to "forge the contract" in order to be elected 'umda.[3] Social prestige was strongly associated with owning land. It placed the small farmholder among the privileged group in the village, no matter how small his patch of land was. 'Abd al-Hādī knows that his faddan gives him a "special place" in the village, it allows him "to sit at the cafe ... where the 'umda and the prominent men sit, when he goes to the capital of the province."[4] Wasīfa, the village 'belle' expresses what land means to a peasant when she rejects 'Alwānī's offer of marriage for no other reason than his being a landless day-labourer. She tells him that "the one who does not own land in the village possesses nothing at all, not even honour!"[5] The fact that her father owns only half an acre does

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1. 'A.R. Sharqāwī, al-Ard, p. 55.
   Three quarters of the four million persons occupied in agriculture do not even own as much as one acre. Other smallholders have had their plots fragmented because of the rapid increase of population and because of Muslim laws of inheritance. See Ayrout, op. cit., pp. 16, 20; Baer, Population and Society, p. 145.
2. 'A.R. al-Sharqāwī, op. cit., p. 55.
3. Ibid. Village headmen, 'umdas, must own ten faddans of land and were appointed by their superiors. In 1928 the British Government insisted on the withdrawal of a measure proposed by the Egyptian government for the election of 'umdas. A bill introduced in 1956 aimed at the appointment of the 'umda by ballot. Baer, Population and Society, p. 166.
4. 'A.R. al-Sharqāwī, op. cit., p. 55.
5. Ibid., p. 42.

not alter the situation. Among the village community the "respectability of a person" was judged according to the acreage of land he possessed.[1]

The tremendous value given to land for the reasons mentioned above made the peasant very land hungry. "Land to them is all the yesterdays, the today and all the tomorrows."[2] To own and join up little strips of land, to increase the number of faddans he would buy land or rent it at exhorbitant prices, thus unheedingly falling into the hands of money-lenders who exploited his need and ignorance and lent him money often at 30 per cent or even 50 per cent interest.[3] Consequently he fell deeper and deeper into debt, making it possible for the creditors to foreclose on his land for non-payment. Those who were a little better off among them would help other penniless peasants when the sarrāf (the fiscal agent) intensified the demand for tax.[4] This is what Muḥammad Afandī does, because he is the only one among the peasants

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1. S. Gadalla in a study on the effect of Land Reform (1952) on rural communities points out that "the status of the lower-class peasant families changed in a manner which followed exactly the pattern of land distribution. The farmers who acquired land ownership attained thereby a higher social status than that of all other peasants in the estate." Gadalla, Land Reform in Relation to Social Development, p.66.
2. ʿA.R. al-Sharqāwī, al-Ard, p. 100.
3. H. Ayrout, op. cit., p. 57.
4. Ibid., p. 24.

"who is known to have money." Being a school-teacher he gets £E4 a month.[1] But he takes the land as security and ploughs it. If his debtor is unable to pay the debt he buys the pawned land. Thus he and his brother came to possess one faddan and 20 qīrāts in addition to the 15 qīrāts they inherited from their father.[2] In al-Ard we also learn how Shaikh Yūsuf the owner of the small village shop is "putting piastre on piastre" to regain his pawned land, the only patch left, after the government "took a large part because he did not pay the taxes.[3]

Though acts were passed which in a few cases appeared to be for the protection and interest of the peasant, in reality he was usually the victim of the law. Throughout the nineteenth century, though part of the land came gradually to be registered in the name of the peasant who farmed it, the burden of taxation and the corvée ensured that many lost their land again.[4] Moreover the transition from the payment of taxes in kind to cash payments threw the peasants into the hands of money lenders. This was facilitated by the introduction of modern laws of mortgage with the establishment of the Mixed Courts in 1875. The indebtedness of the peasant lost him his land to the creditor, and the number of landless peasants increased.[5] Banks were not allowed by law

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1. ʿA. R. al-Sharqāwī, op.cit., p.126.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. G. Baer, "Social Change in Egypt, 1800-1914", in Political and Social Change in Modern Egypt, ed. by P.M.Holt, p.141.
5. Ibid. At the end of the century between one and two million peasants must have been landless.

to seize small farmholdings. On the surface this appeared to be for the protection of the small landowner. In reality it strengthened the grip of the money-lenders to whom the peasant was forced to turn since the Bank refused to give him credit against which it could not claim his land. In the twentieth century the general trend brought about by the system as a whole was the restriction of the poorest peasants to smaller and smaller areas, although the land under cultivation in Egypt had increased since 1906 by over a quarter of a million acres (in 1930).[1] Bills demanding land redistribution were rejected as has been pointed out. However, a reform of the Waqf system was advocated and the Wafq Law was promulgated in 1946. The explanation lies in the benefits derived by the upper class from such a law.[2] The same goes for the policy of selling public domain to the small farmholders and landless labourers. Through it, it was hoped to avoid more drastic measures aimed at limiting the size of their large estates.[3]

The poor man's position before the law was far from equal to that of the rich. Tawfīq al-Hakīm in Yawmiyyāt Nā'ib drawing on his own experience as public prosecutor comments on the procedure

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1. Elinor Burns, op. cit., pp. 62-63.
2. G. Baer, Landownership, p. 219. Reform was limited to Wafq ahlī. Wafq khairī was not touched upon as it would have harmed 'noble families', while the rest of the upper class would not have benefited from it.
3. The peasant very rarely benefited from these sales as he never had the money for the first payment. The land was usually sold to the highest bidders who were urban capitalists or existing landowners. For details see Ayrout, op. cit., p. 20. Baer, Population and Society, p. 154.

employed in the administration of the law, which ought to take the mentality of the villagers and the extent of their understanding ..." into consideration, or "raise their comprehension to the level of those laws."[1] He explains that the peasant will not understand a law that considers him a thief because he "ate what he planted"[2], or wore garments he found in a sack washed ashore,[3] or that makes him pay 20 piastres for having washed his clothes in a canal. The peasants have been left all their lives to live like "cattle", remarks the author, and yet they are asked to submit to the most modern imported law.[4] All those brought before the judge and accused of "misdemeanour" and asked to pay 20 piastres, do not believe that they have committed any wrong. The verdict they consider as a "calamity" inflicted upon them from heaven like any other disaster.[5] The author reflects on the futility of the trials since the "wrong doer" does not realize that he has done anything wrong.[6] For the "crimes" which the law has invented to protect the property of the government or that of the money-lenders, are not "natural crimes" in the peasant's point of view, "whereas beating, murder and stealing are.[7]

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1. T. al-Hakīm, Yawmiyyāt Nā'ib, p. 123.
2. Ibid., p. 84.
3. Ibid., p. 64.
4. Ibid., p. 32.
5. Ibid., p. 33.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid., pp. 84-85.

The incompatibility of the peasant's backwardness and the imported law is stressed. However, a major point, the rights of the peasants vis-a-vis the duties imposed upon him by this law, is not mentioned. The author does not stress the connection between the peasant's poverty and the misdemeanor he commits.

The whole of Yawmiyyāt Nā'ib reflects the total disregard for the peasant. Whether it is in the treatment of the accused who in most cases are not given a chance to say anything in their defence, or in the speedy and careless way verdicts are passed by a judge, whose sole concern is to catch a certain train,[1] or the wrongful imprisonment of innocent people;[2] the pronouncement of judgement before finding out relevant facts[3] and the later fabrication of reasons for the verdict given, all indicate that man is regarded as worthless. The system of the barber-surgeons - they are responsible for public health - is censured. It is a system "not known in any country in the world"[4] writes al-Ḥakīm. They receive five piastres from the family of a deceased person and obtain a licence for the burial. They do so without so much as looking at the face of the dead person or going to his house. Al-Ḥakīm calls them "jobbers of burial."[5]

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1. Ibid., p. 82.
2. Ibid., p. 122.
3. Ibid., p. 128.
4. Ibid., p. 106. "If the fellahin still go to the barber for treatment though they die of it, it is usually because he is the only practitioner available." Ayrout, op. cit., p. 78. also see Rose al-Yūsuf, No. 2220, 28th December 1970, pp.14-15.
5. T. al-Ḥakīm, Yawmiyyāt, p. 105.

He goes on to say that even were they honest, their ignorance would prove a handicap in finding out the real cause of death. An incident he comes across reveals how a barber, for a bribe, covered up a crime and buried the person without reporting the death to the ʿumda.[1] Similarly, the system of village "midwives" is condemned.[2]

In al-Ard the peasants' insignificance is depicted in authority's attitude towards them. They are rounded up, sent to the police centre by the ʿumda where they are imprisoned and tortured by the maʾmūr and his men, without any trial.[3] In the same novel we see how Muḥammad Abū Swailem, the upright watchman, is victimized by the ʿumda for no apparent reason. He succeeds in having him dismissed. Even then he does not stop persecuting him whenever an appropriate occasion arises.[4] ʿAbd al-Majīd Nāfiʿ (a lawyer) writing on the administration of law in 1946, states that in most cases "the rich have the means to escape the fist of justice". If they stand in the position of the accused they will be able to find one way or another to escape the weight of punishment falling upon them.[5] Needless to say, the same did not apply to the poor. Muḥammad Abū Swailem in al-Ard is the

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1. Ibid., p. 105.
2. Ibid., p. 106.
3. ʿA. R. al-Sharqāwī, al-Ard, p. 266.
4. Ibid., p. 100.
5. ʿAbd al-Majīd Nāfiʿ, al-Salām al-Ijtimāʿī (Cairo, n.d.)

mouthpiece for the suffering, all-enduring and helpless poor. On hearing the latest of the 'umda's and Mahmūd Bey's tricks played on the peasants he bursts out: "So you've seen the connivance of the 'umda, the Bey and the government ... They ridiculed us and we acquiesced, they dismissed us from the post of head watchman and we acquiesced, they broke our water wheels and cut off the water and we acquiesced ... and much more is in store for us so long as we acquiesce."

"Well, what is to be done?" asks the frustrated 'Abd al-Hādī.

"Muhammad Abū Swailem falls silent. A sudden bewilderment overcomes him. He himself does not know what is to be done."[1] However, one detects in Abū Swailem's words a slight change from the customary totally submissive attitude of the peasants. The oppression and exploitation of the peasants lead to conflicts between them and the government or its representatives. The arbitrary destruction of the peasants' land leads to sabotage. A group of villagers under cover of night throw all the iron bars and drills, brought for the purpose of constructing the road, into the canal. It is their way of expressing defiance of authority and a declaration of their right to exist.[2]

Agrarian unrest and acts of defiance as depicted in al-Ard were frequent in the thirties after the crisis; following foreclosures of peasants' land in the forties; during the breakdown

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1. 'A. R. al-Sharqāwī, al-Ard, p. 189.
2. Ibid., pp. 320-322.

of supplies, the spread of epidemics and a widening of the disparities between the haves and the have-nots after the war. Social tension in the villages led to the killing of the landowners, their agents, their overseers and the guards or the 'umdas. In 1951 Egypt was the scene of severe clashes between peasants and landowners on the question of rents. Violent incidents occurred in Buhūt, a village on the estates of the Badrāwī-'Āshūr family in Gharbiyya province in June of that year. Later peasants on the estate of Muḥammad 'Alī Tawfīq, the Crown Prince, revolted against their landlord, and at al-Sirū (Daqahliyya) tenants of State Domain squatted on lands formerly rented by them, demanding that the government should sell them these lands as promised and not put them up for sale by auction as it decided to do later.[1]

The economic depression of the peasantry has handicapped the improvement of the urban workers' conditions. In spite of the very low wages in industry, they are still higher than in the countryside. This made it easy for employers to keep workers' wages down as has been mentioned above. The rise in the cost of living after World War I was not accompanied by a parallel rise in wages.[2] The living standard of the Egyptian worker was so low that any deterioration as a result of increased living costs hit his essential needs and impelled him to put up a desperate

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1. For details see G. Baer, Landownership, p. 221; also Population and Society, p. 152; al-Ahrām, May 18m 1954.
2. Issawi, Egypt at Mid-Century, p. 171.

fight.[1] The situation was further aggravated by recurring falls in cotton prices every few years - 1920, 1926, 1930 - bringing acute distress to the peasants and depression in practically every trade.[2] Each time, these conditions gave rise to a series of strikes,[3] which spread from one industry to another through many districts and which were met by an increasing effort to suppress them by consecutive governments. On the whole the workers gained some improvements in their working conditions in the factories.[4] Prices outstripped wages after the two world wars. Since 1952 a relative improvement in their condition has taken place.[5] However, poverty and the malnutrition of the peasant lie at the root of the worker's low income. Their ignorance results in low productivity. Poor equipment and inadequate management do not help to improve matters.

It is regrettable that the novelists do not give any picture of the workers and their life. No light is shed on the injustices suffered by this section of the exploited masses.

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1. Baer, Population and Society, p. 237. The unskilled workers frequently resorted to sit-in strikes. The pressure of the rural and urban unemployed necessitated this from of struggle.
2. Elinor Burns, op. cit., p. 55.
3. Strikes occured in 1920, 1924, 1927, 1936, 1938, 1942. The latter was drastically dealt with, many workmen being imprisoned. For details see Issawi, Egypt at Mid-Century, p.173.
4. Ibid., pp. 175-177. The improvement has taken the form of shorter hours, better working conditions and the provision by the larger firms of various amenities; also Issawi, Egypt in Revolution, p. 193.
5. Money wages have risen from PT 189 a week in January 1951 to PT 233 in January 1959, while the cost-of-living index remained practically unchanged. See Issawi, Egypt in Revolution, p. 193.

Income

The 'financial world' of the masses in the novels is expressed in terms of piastres, half piastres and millīms. The £E is never mentioned among them in their daily dealings. This is supported by Baer who states that "the populations' standard of living and consumption is very poor. Egypt is among the countries with the lowest per capita rates for consumption of food, textiles ... etc."[1] In his novel on the peasants, Idrīs shows us a detailed picture of the tarḥīla, the casual labourers, the poorest of the rural masses.[2] Their misery is highlighted by the comparison drawn between their state and that of the tenant labourers who on all accounts can only be considered poor, but who regard themselves, despite their low income and indebtedness, as better off. "It is true that the taftīsh takes most of the produce but what is left covers their needs, clothes and feeds them and makes them undoubtedly look at the ghrabwa (strangers) as they would look at human dregs, hungry and compelled to migrate in order to work and eat."[4] The "despised" ghrabwa

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1. Baer, Population and Society, p. 26.
2. According to the 1959 distribution of income quoted in Issawi, Egypt in Revolution, the landless among the rural masses were 12 million. pp. 119-120.
3. For details on the taftīsh see D. Warriner, Land reform, p. 26.
4. Yūsuf Idrīs, al-Harām, p. 17. The position of the small tenant-cultivator was better than that of the casual labourer only in so far as he was more regularly employed. See D. Warriner, Land reform, p. 27.

consider themselves lucky when they get a day's work. It is a "rare luxury" "coveted and sought". They rely wholly on the "migratory season" when the agent comes and carries them off in lorries to various estates in the Daqahliyya and Sharqiyya provinces or to al-Fayyūm and Banū Suwaif.[1] And though the agent deprives them of about a third of their meagre wages (6 piastres instead of 9), they are beside themselves with joy, we are told, when Fikrī Afandī the overseer makes his appearance in the village. He is followed, preceded, accompanied, looked at hopefully as if "he had pots of gold which he was going to distribute among them ..."[2] When he enters the agent's house the "noise increases, as more and more ants crawl out of their holes expecting work", in other words, expecting food. Loud cries expressing relief and joy are heard. Everybody embraces everybody else. So dire is their poverty, so near starvation are they that their contentment with the six piastres or less per day for the few weeks of employment indicates the extent of their misery.[3] The unlucky ones, who are left behind, find

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1. Ibid., p. 87.
2. Ibid., p. 18.
3. Ibid., pp. 18-19. Money wages were terribly low and have remained at the same level for most of the first half of this century. Before the war the total earnings of a labourer per month were only 6s. In 1934 the total earnings of a family per day amounted to 4 piastres and the whole earnings of the family per month amounted to 60 pieastres. D. Warriner, Land and Poverty in the Middle East, pp. 38-39. According to the 1958 distribution of income it appears that the landless peasant's income has not undergone any change. His annual income did not exceed £E3.5. Issawi. Egypt in Revolution, p. 120.

nothing to console each other with except the word "patience". Their disappointment and distress are reflected in the eyes of the sick, the old and all those exceeding the required number They watch the "victorious procession entering into a world of work, of wages, of a morsel of bread."[1]

All along the long strip of the Nile valley, the majority of the rural population was preoccupied by one thought, work. Work meant earning a few piastres by which hunger could be averted. Though physically exhausted at the end of a long day, we see those tarḥīla shrugging off their tiredness when the danger of the cotton worm drives the overseer to hire them for a second shift. They are happy to work extra hours and are satisfied with a few hours' sleep before dawn or at sunset. Their struggle for existence is summed up in the author's comment: "The tired body is no problem, the problem is the piastre and the opportunity to get it."[2] The question of opportunity to find work is also reflected in Yawmiyyāt Nā'ib which gives a record of the Egyptian countryside at about the same period as al-Ḥarām (1930s) although written some twenty years earlier. We hear the hungry peasant telling the public prosecutor when he is asked why he resorts to stealing instead of working in order to feed himself: "Give me work and shame fall upon me if I were to refrain. But the poor

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1. Y. Idrīs, op.cit., p. 20.
2. Ibid., p.136.

among us find work one day and nothing but hunger ten other days."[1] The condition of the casual labourer is so desperate that he actually wishes the worm to attack the cotton as this would provide him with work. This is reflected in al-Ard when a number of jobless landless peasant youths go to the village mosque to pray, in the hope of God answering their prayer and sending the worm.[2]

In al-Harām the author points out that in this poverty stricken countryside the piastre becomes of great value. It is changed into smaller coins, and bits of various articles are purchased in millīms. "Every day before sunset," writes Idrīs, "Junaidī Abū Khalaf's shop, the only shop in the estate is crowded, crowded with earthenware plates and emaciated outstretched hands." Hoarse voices persistently demand in their twisted ghrabwa dialect "three millīms of oil, one millīm of salt ... quarter of piastry honey ..." Junaidī sells and "the rusty millīms gather into a heap in his greasy drawer, all millīms and nickels, the biggest is a coin of 10 millīms."[3]

The scarcity of money, and often its complete disappearance for months on end, induces the villagers to acquire their necessities by barter from the one shop in the village. Shaikh Yūsuf

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1. T. al-Ḥakīm, Yawmiyyāt, p. 61.
2. 'A.R. al-Sharqāwi, al-Ard, p. 76.
3. Y. Idrīs, op. cit., p. 21. The food of the tarḥila is almost entirely vegetarian. See Issawi, Egypt at Mid-Century, p.88; H. Ayrout, op. cit., p. 83.

in al-Ard is constantly exchanging an article in his shop for something the villagers have brought. At one time it is a packet of cigarette paper for five maize cobs, at another 3 eggs for a piece of indigo.[1] When a piastre is available then it is a "pinch of tea leaves" and a "pinch of sugar", both carefully packed as if the most precious article is being bought.[2] ʿAlwānī, the guard, does not know "what a piastre looks like until the end of the water-melon season when he is paid for guarding the field. What he receives as a wage will not suffice to cover his small account at Shaikh Yūsuf's shop."[3] When one evening, he musters his courage and asks the gallant ʿAbd al-Hādī, the holder of one faddan, if he can lend him a riyāl, the latter shakes his head in surprise: "A riyāl? Is there anyone who comes across it? ... No one has money ..."[4] A similar remark is made by the above mentioned peasant in Yawmiyyāt, who is asked by the judge to pay fifty piastres as a penalty for having stolen a maize cob. He can hardly believe his ears. "Fifty piastres? By your head, my eyes have not fallen on any kind of money for two months. I have forgotten what half a piastre looks like. I don't know whether it still has a hole in the middle or whether they have closed it."[5] He makes it clear to

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1. ʿA.R. al-Sharqāwī, al-Ard, p. 73.
2. Ibid., p. 105.
3. Ibid., p. 58.
4. Ibid., p. 59-60.
5. T. al-Hakīm, Yawmiyyāt, p. 62.

the public prosecutor that, had he the money, he would not have stolen a maize cob to still his hunger. An incident in which Waṣīfa the village beauty is involved reflects the scarcity of money among the villagers as a whole. She is beside herself with joy when she learns from the 'schoolboy' who is home from Cairo that instead of the "bottle of scent" he had promised to bring her he will give her a berīza a "ten piastre piece." In her excitement she keeps repeating "a berīza! A whole berīza! How wonderful! ... In the village even Shaikh al-Balad hardly possesses a berīza in cash."[1] Husain Mu'nis stresses the great importance attached by the peasant to money, an indication of its scarcity and the difficulty of obtaining it. "Nothing frightens the peasants... as much as asking them for money. Currency in their view is the most valuable thing in the world..."[2]

Urban Poor

The general picture derived from the novels concerning the lower stratum of the urban poor indicates a similar low level of living and meagre earnings.[3] In al-Saqqā Māt we learn

1. 'A.R. al-Sharqāwī, al-Ard, pp. 35, 37.
2. H. Mu'nis, Ahlan wa Sahlan, p. 56.
3. The majority of the urban lower class has no definite livelihood. There is underemployment in addition to unemployment in the cities. For details see Issawi, Egypt at Mid-Century pp. 87, 131, 171, 241; also 'Abbās 'Ammār on underemployment in the cities in al-Ahrām, 30 August 1954.

how Shḥāta the professional mourner has not one millīm in the pocket of his shabby garment. His shoes are colourless, old and self-repaired. The sole he made himself from a piece of "tyre rubber". He cannot afford a meal and has no lodgings. His only belongings are in a small bundle which he refers to as "the tools of my trade". The little money he earns at odd times hardly covers the bare necessities for a short while, "it remains for seconds only in my fingers". This point is further emphasised when he says he has no wallet "because I do not have any money."[1] On another occasion, when taken in error for an undertaker by Shūsha, the water-carrier, he exclaims: "How I wish I were. The undertaker is a big master, prosperous and confortable." Whereas he (Shḥāta) has to spend days without food and is often without shelter.[2] Similarly craftsmen like the calligrapher Nūnū in Khān al-Khalīlī, earns just enough to keep him and his large family alive. One day he does not earn "one millīm" nor does anyone know "what the family is going to eat". Another day he is paid in advance for "work he has been asked to do and meat, radishes and water-melon " are bought.[3]

Owners of small shabby looking 'cafés' such as Kirsha's or Salāma's so-called "restaurant of princes" where local and popular dishes are served, appear to be people with a slightly

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1. Y. al-Sibā'ī, al-Saqqā Māt, p. 76.
2. Ibid., p. 259.
3. N. Maḥfūẓ, Khān al-Khalīlī, p. 46.

higher income. The same could be said of the butcher who does his best to lend PT.150 desperately needed by Shūsha the water-carrier, so that he can pay the sum as a guarantee to the company which appointed him as "water distributor" in the square of their quarter.[1] It is, however, worth wondering what possible income a man like Kāmil, the basbūsa seller could have. We are told that he sits all day long at the entrance to his shop in a "perpetual doze", with the "fly-flap" on his lap, waking up when a customer happens to call. It is evident that "business" is not brisk.[2] From Zuqāq al-Midaqq one has the impression that barbers are considered to have a relatively better income. 'Abbās al-Ḥulū's shop or "salon" is regarded as "elegant"[3] It has a mirror and a chair besides the barber's tools. 'Abbās himself seems to have raised his status by wearing a suit and an apron instead of the customary gallābiyya worn in the popular quarters. Evidence of his apparent economic 'superiority' is Ḥamīda's willingness to marry him, she the ambitious and egoistic belle of the alley. She accepts him as a suitor for none of her friends can hope to marry any man "better off" financially.[4] 'Abbās, however, though content and unambitious, knows that "his life is mere drudgery". Each day's work scarcely covers that day's expenses.[4]

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1. Y. al-Sibā'ī, al-Saqqā Māt, p. 400.
2. N. Maḥfūẓ, Zuqāq al-Midaqq, p. 6.
3. Ibid., p. 7.
4. Ibid., p. 129.

Hansom cab-drivers of whom a few still exist are among the poorest. Their poverty and want is reflected in their emaciated figures, shabby clothes and the 'weakness' of their only 'capital' the horse and the cab. In Ahlan wa Sahlan we pass by a parking place of hansom cabs. The horses stand "gaunt and immobile" because of "weariness" and the cabs to which they are attached are old and derelict. They looked as if they would "fall to pieces, were a human being to touch them."[1] As for the driver who is to take the 'umda to his required destination, he is but "a human skeleton" with "a fading fez on its head".[2] We learn how after long bargaining it is agreed that the driver is to take his two passengers to their fairly distant destination for six piastres.[3]

Though servants consitute the second largest group[4] among the urban poor, little is said of them in the novels. On the few occasions when they appear, they are not seen in the light of a labouring group, nor is their poverty and hard life dealt with by the author. Stress is placed rather on their social status than on their meagre wages. There is no mention anywhere of the income of those members of the lower class,[5] or how and when a

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1. H. Mu'nis, Ahlan wa Sahlan, p. 201.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Under the distribution of income in 1958 they were estimated at about a million, i.e. 12% of the urban population. C. Issawi, Egypt in Revolution, p. 120.
5. Under the above mentioned distribution of income, domestic servants' annual income was recorded as about £E21. Ibid.

servant is paid. As supply is plentiful because of the pressure of population, labour is very cheap and quite a few among the lower middle class and the more skilled craftsmen could afford to keep servants. The abuse of power by the master or the harsh treatment they underwent in reality in most cases, is not reflected. The thousands of children working as servants and given the responsibility of adults and treated with little tolerance and no understanding is a subject completely neglected by the authors. The impression a reader gets from the few portraits of adult servants is of a friendly atmosphere existing between master and servant. Mabrūk in ʿAudat al-Rūḥ is thought of as one of the family. He has been with them ever since he was a child. He takes part in all their pleasures and sorrows, and shares the same food. However, Mabrūk himself feels he is different, when he compares his clothes with theirs and the many errands he has to run to satisfy the whims of Zannūba the sister, who keeps the house for the other four bachelors.[1] Umm Ḥanafī is treated in a similar fashion in ʿAbd al-Jawwād's house.[2] So is the servant girl Najiyya in Ḥawwā''s house.[3]

In Khān al-Khalīlī, we learn that certain quarters of Cairo "exported" servants who were transformed in other quarters into "belles" as one of the consequences of war. "The servants . . .

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1. T. al-Ḥakīm, ʿAudat al-Ruḥ, p. 43.
2. Maḥfūẓ, Bain al-Qaṣrain, p. 35.
3. T. Lāshīn, Ḥawwā' bilā Ādam, passim.

have deserted the kitchens and gone to the cabarets,"[1] remarks a man to his friends. Despite the frequent mention of prostitutes, prostitution itself is not treated as a social problem. Prostitutes are seen as a source af men's sexual gratification. Owing to the scarcity of information it is difficult to give anything like a correct estimate of the number of professional prostitutes, widespread among the lower classes because of destitution.[2] As for the novels, though the link is unintentional, it is clear that poverty has driven the girls to prostitute their bodies for a meagre sum (e.g. Khadra, Nafīsa, and the girl picked up by Maḥjūb in al-Ard, Bidāya wa Nihāya and al-Qāhira alJadīda respectively).

Among those mentioned casually, except for beggars in Ard al-Nifāq, but who nevertheless make up a considerable proportion of the poor, are those engaged in what are considered the lowest occupations: pedlars, hawkers, jugglers, conjurors, vagabonds, smugglers and beggars, the largest group of all. No data are available on the income of these people. In formal sources they are classified under "employment unspecified". There is no doubt that the income of the majority is very low. Moreover it is an irregular income usually dependent on the mood and goodwill of the public. A glimpse into the life of a qirdātī indicates that he barely makes a living with the few millīms and ½ piastres

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1. N. Maḥfūẓ, Khān al-Khalīlī, p. 127.
2. Brothels and procurers are casually mentioned in a number of novels (al-Saqqā Māt, all novels of Maḥfūẓ in this study, and al-Ard.)
3. Issawi, Egypt in Revolution, p. 120; also Baer, Population and Society, p.224.

he collects after the monkey has performed its tricks.[1] Life is also getting very difficult for the group of "story tellers" the popular poets whose heyday we learn has passed. The radio has taken over and their services are dispensed with. Kirsha the proprietor of the 'coffee shop' tells the "old decrepit poet" who has been reciting romances in that place for twenty years that "we know all the stories". People today, he tells him, do not want a shā'ir, but a radio, and asks him to leave them and go "and may God provide you with subsistence."[2] The man is filled with a sense of loss and despair. He has no other income and begs Kirsha to allow him to stay.[3]

Many of those who leave the overpopulated rural areas, find themsleves without work in the towns and are driven into unproductive, parasitical labour. They occupy themselves in any one of the numerous little makeshift jobs: from selling odds and ends in the street to running errands for the many 'suit pressers', or cleaning shoes. Others resort to tricks, forgery and theft to make a living. Sharāra in Ahlan wa Sahlan is an interesting study of a Jack-of-all-trades. Būshī, the quack dentist, in

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1. Y. al-Sibā'ī, al-Saqqā Māt, p. 40.
2. N. Mahfūz, Zuqāq al-Midaqq, p. 11. The Shā'ir, a reciter and story-teller, is still much the public entertainer in the rural areas, during festivities and mawlids in particular.
3. N. Mahfūz, Zuqāq al-Midaqq, p. 11.

Zuqāq al-Midaqq is another. Both make a living by dishonest means. Both exploit the ignorance and the inexperience of the people. Both are clever at dodging authority. Zaiṭa represents another form of earning a living among the lowest level of urban poor. He is a master in the art of deforming the body and distorting the features of would-be beggars, a job he takes very seriously. He studies the "human material in front of him with care" so as to carry out the appropriate transformation, every man according to what suits him best. His fees are two millīms a day from each of his 'clients', a share of the collected bread in addition to the original fee for the "operation" when one is necessary.[1] The likes of Zaiṭa are in demand as can be inferred from both Zuqāq al-Midaqq and Ard al-Nifāq. In a society where the gap between rich and poor was immense and where the majority were poor, begging flourished and became a well organized profession.[2] In Ard al-Nifāq, a beggar the narrator comes across, tells him that he is sure that begging is "the only thing in Egypt which stands on a solid foundation with no improvisation and that it is the most successful of all Egypt's projects."[3]

Thieves, burglars, swindlers, pickpockets prowling about the streets and smugglers are only casually mentioned, if at all.

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1. Ibid., pp. 75-78, 154-157.
2. Y. al-Sibā'ī, Ard al-Nifāq, pp. 234-241.
3. Ibid., p. 240.

A rough estimate of their economic condition can be gleaned from their way of life and where they live. Judging by the financial help Ḥasan in Bidāya wa Nihāya can give to his two penniless brothers, one assumes that smuggling, though a dangerous way of earning a living, is certainly a more lucrative one than "working as a mechanic", as Ḥasan was advised to do by his family for the sake of respectability.[1]

Details of the expenditure of the urban poor shed light on their income. As with the rural masses, it is expressed in millīms and piastres. Shūsha the water-carrier pays three piastres for a meal for himself and his son. He is surprised to hear that Shḥata's meal alone cost him four piastres, a "huge amount" which he could ill afford had he not promised to help the penniless stranger in his hour of need.[2] Later he buys a water-melon for 2½ piastres and a piece of cheese for one piastre.[3] His son Sayyid buys ta'miyya (hot fritters) for 4 millīms. As they earn their living in piastres they spend in piastres or less. Banknotes are a rarity among members of this class. Their value and significance is evident even among the lower middle class. Maḥjūb is "stunned" on being given £E20 for having accepted a deal. He keeps fingering them with concern and gazes at them

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1. N. Maḥfūẓ, Bidāya wa Nihāya, pp. 292-293.
2. Y. al-Sibā'ī, al-Saqqā Māt, p. 72-73.
3. Ibid., pp. 82, 84.
4. Ibid., p. 182.

with wonder and disbelief.[1] He is no different from Ḥamīda, who belongs to the lower class. She too is fascinated by the bank-notes a stranger to the alley holds out to the waiter under her gaze.[2]

Though the lower middle class ranks above the labouring poor in the social scale - a large section being minor civil servants - economically in most instances the difference is almost negligible.[3] Their income is so low that it would not be amiss to consider them one of the principal sufferers by unequal distribution of wealth.[4] A few examples of the hard conditions of this class will suffice to illustrate this point. In Ahlan wa Sahlan we listen to Shaikh Zahrān, the Azhar graduate complaining of his plight. He works, he says, "like a slave" late into the night as a "proof-reader" on a party newspaper for £E7 per month. This salary is never paid regularly, "all in one lump ... no ... the chief gives us our salaries in instalments, three pounds at the beginning of the month, then a pound every few days ... and even then it is necessary to beg them.... Not one month passes without his cheating us of a £E1 at least ..."[5] Zahrān's low monthly salary is highlighted when seen against the squandering of money by Rifqī Pasha the Secretary of the same Party. He spends £E200 donated to the party on food and drink for one evening.[6]

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1. Maḥfūẓ, al-Qāhira al-Jadīda, p. 122.
2. Maḥfūẓ, Zuqāq al-Midaqq, pp. 198-199.
3. G. Baer, Population and Society, pp. 223-224.
4. Khalid M. Khalid, From Here We Start, trans. (Michigan, 1953), p. 92.
5. Husain Mu'nis, Ahlan wa Sahlan, p. 153.
6. Ibid., p. 218.

Ṭāhir Lāshīn in Hawwā' bilā Ādam illuminates the gap between the haves and have nots with insight. In the person of Ḥawwā', the hard-working teacher from the lower middle class, he represents the sufferings of this class. Ḥawwā', whose piano lessons to Naẓīm Pasha's young daughter give her glimpses into the life of the rich, their opulence, the leisure they enjoy and the graciousness of their living, on a sudden impulse invites Ramzī the Pasha's son to her modest house. Once inside the house she realizes the reality of the situation. The enormous gap that exists between her standard of living and that of Ramzī comes into sharp focus when the servant girl calls in a loud voice whether she should go and buy a 'soft drink' for the guest for one piastre or half a piastre.[1]

The inadequate income of the lower middle class and the effect it had on their way of life and outlook and the various hardships they shared with the lower classes is referred to in non-fictional writings. In From Here We Start Khalid M. Khalid voices his anger and resentment at the condition of the petty officials. He describes them as "neither dead nor alive".[2] The same attitude is taken by Najīb Maḥfūẓ in most of his novels which deal with this class. Aḥmad 'Ākif's situation is a copy of the case of a minor official described by Khālid Muḥammad Khālid. He is one of the thousands of "half forgotten officials".[3] For

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1. Ṭāhir Lāshīn, Hawwā' bilā Ādam, p. 82.
2. Khalid M. Khalid, op. cit., p. 92.
3. Maḥfūẓ, Khān al-Kalīlī, p. 271.

twenty years he stayed in the eighth grade despite the continuous rise in the cost of living. Maḥjūb is another glaring example of the difficulties this class has to encounter because of its low income. As a university student he has to live on £E3 per month. It is the utmost his father - a clerk in a dairy company - can squeeze out of his £E8 monthly salary. Later Maḥjūb has to exist on £E1 a month, as his father is taken ill and there are no social security arrangements[1] from which the family could benefit. Maḥjūb suffers hunger and cold and finds it impossible to buy a much needed textbook. In an attempt to earn some money he is sent through an aquaintance to a "charitable party" given by fashionable society, to act as a reporter. His haggard pale face and faded clothes stand in strange contrast with the smooth skinned, magnificently dressed and bejewelled guests. Jewels he sees, one of which would be enough to cover the expenses of all university students. He concludes that "money is authority, is power, is everything in this world."[2] In Bidāya wa Nihāya we hear of the hardships of ʿAlī Kāmil's family. The family of four have to live on £E5 a month after their father's death. Cuts are made in all directions, but worst of all is the economising on food. They are in a state of continual hunger.[3]

A point worth mentioning here and which is significant of the difference in social standing if not in the economic level

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1. Maḥfūẓ, al-Qāhira al-Jadīda, pp. 40, 50.
2. Ibid., pp. 92-94.
3. Maḥfūẓ, Bidāya wa Nihāya, p. 144.

between the lower and the lower middle classes, is their attitude to poverty. It is evident from most novels that whereas the 'working class' poor accept their poverty and miserable conditions with patience , the lower middle class does not. Though they believe in a pre-ordained decree, their attitude is only partially governed by this. They do not, like the lower classes, try to adjust themselves to unfavourable situations. Being less ignorant through having had more opportunity to attend school and in some cases a university, and having come into closer contact with the middle and upper classes because of their work, their belief in fate is affected by the social aspirations of their class. Whilst the lower class sees any attempt at changing its position in life as an act of defiance of destiny for which it will eventually be punished, the lower middle class is driven by self interest to change its situation and strives for an improved position. The following examples illustrate the two attitudes vividly. Nūnū, the calligrapher, never knowing whether he will earn anything that day, is not worried, because "it is wise not to let worry overcome us." For "what He ordains is carried out ... so why trouble oneself with thought and grief?" According to him the only way to get the better of this world is to disregard it. His philosophy in life is to treat the "world" as one treats "a woman". He is sure "that the world shuns the one who kneels in front of it and favours him who beats and curses it."[1]

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1. N. Maḥfūẓ, Khān al-Khalīlī, p.46.

The contentment of Nūnū with his lot is not acceptable to Hasanain, the son of a minor official. Discussing with his older brother Husain their unenviable position after their father's death, Husain is ready to believe that they will manage as many others do in similar situations "or do you imagine all people have plentiful subsistence?"[1] he asks his brother. Hasanain does not agree, he rejects this "defeatist" attitude and tells Husain that "he who gives in to fate encourages it to extend its tyranny."[2]

The absence of any social security law led to great suffering among the working masses, agricultural labourers in particular. A law enacting a comprehensive, non-contributory social security scheme was passed as late as 1950. It provided for the payment of pensions and allowances to widows with children, orphans, disabled persons and men and women above 65 years of age.[3] Before that date minor officials in government employment or working for companies rarely received any compensation if dismissed or disabled. All that Mahjūb's father expects to receive from the dairy company where he has been working as a clerk for 25 years is a small compensation hardly sufficient to cover three or four months at the utmost.[4] When ʿĀkif's father has to retire, ʿĀkif has to give up his dream of going to the university. He has to look for work instead, in order to help the family financially.[5]

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1. Mahfūz, Bidāya wa Nihāya, p. 30.
2. Ibid.
3. C. Issawi, Egypt at Mid-Century, p. 76.
4. Mahfūz, al-Qāhira al-Jadīda, p. 34.
5. Mahfūz, Khān al-Khalīlī, p. 14.

Aspects of Poverty

Malnutrition

As a result of the very low level of income caused by the extremely unequal distribution of land, and consequently of the wealth of the country, the masses could ill afford any energy-producing food.[1] The rural and urban poor were engaged in a perpetual struggle for food. They lived in a state of chronic want. At times, as the malaria epidemic disclosed in 1943, landless peasants experienced real hunger.[2] In reports of the United Nations institutions the opinion that "the average diet was inadequate from a nutritional point of view" was often repeated.[3] The hunger and the inability of the masses to supply themselves with satisfactory food is reflected in a number of novels. Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm in Yawmiyyāt Nā'ib records an incident in which an elderly peasant is accused of stealing a cob of maize. He does not deny the accusation but simply explains, in a tone of misery, that "I have stolen because of hunger."[4] The extent of his poverty and hunger is stressed when, on hearing the judge

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1. The diet of the majority consists mainly of bread made from maize, fūl and sometimes vegetables. Meat, milk, eggs or fish are rarely eaten. For details see H. Ayrout, The Egyptian Peasant, pp. 83-84; D. Warriner, Land and Poverty, p. 39; 'A. 'Ammār, People of Sharqiyya (Cairo, 1944), p. 318; also Weir, in Journal of Egyptian Public Health Association, 1952, p. 62.
2. G. Baer, Population and Society, p. 20.
3. United Nations, Review of Economic Conditions in the Middle East, 1951-52, New York, 1953, p. 13. Quoted in Baer, Population and Society, p. 20.
4. T. al-Ḥakīm, Yawmiyyāt, p. 62.

sentencing him to four days imprisonment, he praises God, kisses his hand back and front as a way of thanking Him and says: "What does it matter? Prison is nice. A least we'll have a guaranteed morsel there."[1] 'Azīza in al-Ḥarām starts her day like a "mad person". She rushes from place to place in search of food. So tired is she at the end of the day that no sooner does she put her head on the straw pillow, than off she goes into long oblivion. She is awakened as usual at dawn by that secret call of "the morsel, the empty house, and the open hungry mouths."[2] Food is scanty and of the plainest, usually a flat shaped maize loaf which they eat "with a pinch of salt"[3] or a piece of mish (a coarse sour cheese made of goat's or buffalo's milk and preserved in brine.)[4] Maize bread is the staple food and is consumed in large quantities. "A grown man', writes Ayrout, 'will eat more than three pounds of it a day."[5] Most villages live for as long as possible on their own grain. But the majority have only a scanty reserve which often does not last till the new harvest. Then the peasant has to buy or borrow maize. When Waṣīfa comes out of the 'store room' she is in tears. She informs her mother that "no maize is left to be roasted". Her mother, at a loss, tells her to take the goose "and see if someone will buy it, it may fetch a measure of maize."[6]

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1. Ibid.
2. Y. Idrīs, al-Ḥarām, p. 92.
3. Husain Haykal, Zainab, p. 14.
4. H. Ayrout, The Egyptian Peasant, p. 83.
5. Ibid.
6. 'A. R. al-Sharqāwī, al-Ard, p. 347.

Next to bread, fūl is consumed in large quantities. It is the staple dish of the lower classes. Ḥusain Mu'nis in Ahlan wa Sahlan gives a thorough evaluation, in his sarcastic style, of this popular and cheap cereal and the satisfaction and "ecstasy" derived from eating it. "... a few millīms, provide millions with a completely full stomach ... a few millīms', he repeats stressing the cheapness, and the importance of this cereal in keeping millions alive '... nourish the body and make the destitute feel he is the owner of thousands (of £E)."[1] However, he is not blind to the effects of the continuous stuffing of the stomach with fūl. "It lessens energy ... it lowers the eyelids and sends man into a delicious sleep in which he regards all kinds of struggle as meaningless folly". The author sees this dish as a gentle merciful beneficial drug. "A horse eats it and feels itself a horse, ... man eats it and feels he is a donkey, and there is none in the world," he comments, "more happy, more lazy or more sleepy than a donkey whose stomach is filled with fūl."[2] Ḥasan in Bidāya wa Nihāya rebels against this one and only available dish since their father's death. "Fūl, fūl, fūl', he grumbles, 'is the only dish I have. The donkey gets more variety ..."[3] In ʿAudat al-Rūḥ we learn how all the household have fūl for breakfast, fūl for lunch, and fūl for dinner. It is just differently cooked each time.[4]

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1. Ḥusain Mu'nis, Ahlan wa Sahlan, p. 263.
2. Ibid., p. 264.
3. Maḥfūẓ, Bidāya wa Nihāya, p. 118.
4. T. al-Ḥakīm, ʿAudat al-Rūḥ, p. 26.

The inadequacy of nutrition of the masses is stressed by Ghālī. He writes:

> "It is well known that the inhabitants of Egypt suffer from serious deficiencies in diet, both quantitative and qualitative. ... millet, the main article of food among villagers, does not supply the body with its essential constituents, particularly in view of the low consumption of wheat, milk and meat."[1]

According to Issawi, available evidence on food consumption (1947) points to a fall in the consumption of the main items of food from the years following the First World War, reaching drastic reduction during the Second World War.[2] At the same time the level of consumption of the wealthy rose remarkably so that the gap between rich and poor widened. The poor had to cut essentials and the consumption of the principle cereals fell, whilst the rich increased the number of luxury items.[3]

No matter how low a person's income is or how difficult it is to raise a piastre, tea drinking has become a must, especially with the rural masses. Black tea "has become the drug of the fellah,"[4] writes Ayrout. Issawi supports this view by stating that, when hashīsh was cut off, the peasant replaced it by tea, the consumption of which has more than trebled since 1914.[5] By

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1. M. Ghālī, Siyāsat al-Ghad (Cairo, 1938), pp. 58-62.
2. C. Issawi, Egypt at Mid-Century, pp. 85-86. From 309 kilogrammes consumed per head in 1927-9, it fell to 254 kilogrammes in 1936-38 and to 190 kilogrammes in 1940-41.
3. See Issawi, ibid., p.86.
4. H. Ayrout, p.81.
5. C. Issawi, Egypt at Mid-Century, p.65; Merchants exploit the peasants' addiction to tea, and sell him a mixture of scavenged tea leaves from hotels, cafés and ships, sawdust, mulūkhiyya leaves and bean husks, all as tea. See Ayrout, op.cit., pp.80-81.

boiling it until it turns black - a fashion according to Ayrout introduced from Tripoli[1] - and sweetening it heavily, the peasant drinks it several times a day. His tea-pot even accompanies him to the field. In al-Ard, one can almost feel the enjoyment ʿAlwānī and ʿAbd al-Hādī derive from drinking tea "which laughs and is coquettish like a bride,"[2] or the dejection of ʿAlwānī when the grocer refuses to give him any more tea or sugar unless he pays. In Ahlan wa Sahlan, we are told how the peasants, after returning each from his field, sits at the door of his house and his wife brings him the black tea while he is joined by a few of his friends and "meetings" are held.[3]

Meat is a rarity. It is offered as a treat on certain occasions; on the two great festivals (the Adhā and Breaking the Fast), on weddings and at circumcisions. Even then, many cannot afford to do so. To be able to have meat dishes is a status symbol. It signifies a better income and subsequently a step up the social ladder, closer to the wealthier classes. The hunger for meat among the various poor strata is reflected in a number of novels.

In an amusing episode in al-Saqqā Māt, Sayyid, the water-carrier's son, learns that his friend ʿAlī has brought "his snack"

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1. H. Ayrout, op. cit., p. 80.
2. ʿA.R. al-Sharqāwī, al-Ard, p. 57.
3. Ḥ. Muʿnis, Ahlan wa Sahlan; p. 22.

with him. His mouth waters as ʿAlī tells him that it consists of meat balls, meat slices, liver and brain. ʿAlī being a butcher's son is able to indulge from time to time in what Sayyid considers a luxury. His father could ill afford buying meat. on the money he earns. With great cleverness he goads ʿAlī into having them share the "meal", in return for something Sayyid is going to buy with his piastre by which he will gratify ʿAlī's wish.[1] In another episode in the same novel, Shḥāta the professional mourner who rarely has a nourishing meal, has to exert all his will power not to "attack" the huge pot of tharīd,[2] the top of which is covered with pieces of meat. He wishes he could get his fingers into the meat, but has to wait until all the shaikh's guests are present. When the eating begins Shḥāta "grasps" a piece of meat and "throws" it into his stomach, leaving only "a small cavity for the tharīd."[3]

Meat is also a luxury beyond the frequent reach of the lower middle class. Meat is a major item with which the family of ʿAlī Kāmil have to dispense after their father's death. On £E5 a month the mother of four has to make drastic cuts to keep her family alive. Ḥasanain, one of her sons, comments sarcastically that he has forgotten when they last had any meat. "... I can see a piece of meat through the darkness of memories, but I do not know where or when..." And when Ḥasan, the elder brother,

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1. Y. al-Sibāʿī, al-Saqqā Māt, pp. 166-167.
2. Ibid., p.236.
3. A dish of sopped bread, meat and broth.

surprises them one evening by bringing a whole leg of lamb, they are beside themselves with joy. Objections by the mother to its being cooked there and then are drowned by the clamour of the boys who say that, no matter how long the preparation will take, they are ready to wait for the "magnificent dinner" until dawn.[1] Another picture drawn by Maḥfūz in Zuqāq al-Midaqq indicates the importance given to meat when assessing a person's income and social standing. Food is an important item in Ḥamīda's dream of the "better life" she is aspiring to. When she finally makes up her mind to leave the squalid alley, her thoughts dwell for a moment on the lentils she is eating, she hopes for the last time. She does not dislike lentils, but in her mind they are associated with poverty. Her knowledge of what the rich eat is on the other hand confined to one item, "meat and meat and meat."[2] Issawi's figures on the consumption of meat supplement the general picture given in the novels. Despite the slight rise in the fifties it still falls far short of what the average intake of meat for a person should be.[3]

Meat is the food constantly linked with the rich. In the minds of the hungry and deprived, the tables of the rich are always full of dishes of meat. Consequently, it takes on an exaggerated importance. It is not only seen as a vital energy builder but even

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1. Maḥfūẓ, Bidāya wa Nihāya, p.172.
2. Maḥfūẓ, Zuqaq al-Middaqq, p. 254.
3. Consumption of meat fell from 12.4 Kg. per annum in pre-war time per person to 9.2 Kg. in 1948. C. Issawi, Egypt in Revolution, pp. 122-123.

more as a symbol of a person's financial status.

Housing Conditions

In the late thirties public opinion began to wake up to the deplorable housing conditions prevalent in the country as a whole. Little was done practically to solve the problem that was critical among the peasantry and in the old quarters of towns, especially Cairo. Attempts at constructing cheap houses had been made before 1952 but the problem was of such magnitude that the few thousand houses built did little to solve it.[1] Not enough good and cheap houses are built to accommodate a population with such a high birth rate[2] and whose derelict houses are collapsing.[3]

The mass of the people, the peasants, inhabit "low roofed mud huts", without paint and furniture and "closed to the purifying rays of the sun"[4] in the thousands of villages and estates along the Nile river. "To speak of housing conditions," writes Miss Warriner on the dwellings of the peasants, "is to exaggerate; in the Egyptian village there are no houses."[5] This statement is supported by the picture drawn by Bint al-Shāṭi': "The peasant

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1. Little has been done to improve housing in the rural areas. In towns some progress has been made. From the estimated 60,000 dwellings in 1959 which should have been built each year, 13,100 were built by 1960/61. U.A.R. Yb. 1961, pp. 820-4.
2. Population growth is estimated at 2.5 per cent per annum. Issawi, Egyptian Revolution, p. 105.
3. See Rose al-Yūsuf, No. 2123, 17 February 1969.
4. Mirrit Ghālī, The Policy of Tomorrow, p. 68.
5. D. Warriner, Land and Poverty, p. 43.

lives in dark and broken down hovels which shelter his livestock and his children too; in mean huts of clay covered with a thatch of straw and sugar-cane, most of which are hardly elevated above ground level."[1] Mirrit Ghālī draws a similar picture as already seen above and stresses the crowded unhygienic conditions of these dwellings where "despite the lack of space, part of each house is set apart for animals and the peasant and his family sleep in proximity to the animals and their dung." Moreover the houses "are set one next to the other with no sense of order or planning."[2] According to Ayrout the village is "a huddled, earthy mass, compact and shapeless, crowned with bundles of brushwood."[3] The alleys, for there are no streets in the proper sense of the word, are narrow and "all is dust and disorder".[4] A distinguishing feature of a village, and"nothing is more like one Egyptian village than another Egyptian village,"[5] writes Ayrout, "is the village pond or birka, "a hotbed of disease", a large hole filled with greenish, foul smelling water. It serves as a drinking trough for animals, a swimming pool for children, and sometimes as a source of water for the housewife.[6]

The overcrowded and insanitary conditions of the dwellings of the rural masses have not been criticised by the various authors.

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1. Ibnat al-Shāṭi', Qadiyyat al-Fallāh, p. 52.
2. M. Ghālī, The Policy of Tomorrow, p. 68.
3. H. Ayrout, op. cit., p. 87.
4. Ibid., p. 98.
5. Ibid., p. 89.
6. Ibid., p. 95. A decree of 1892 forbids the "creation of new ponds or the enlarging of those already existing". But the villagers in need of earth in order to build their huts or to make bricks, or excavate a water course or strengthen a dike, have created these holes and then dug deeper and deeper.

Any description is casually made. We hear in al-Ard of "the low dark houses of my village,"[1] of the "shed" on whose roof Diyāb sleeps in summer, guarding the animals;[2] of the room on the roof, away from the shed, and the "hall" in which his mother and brother live, which Muḥammad Afandī built for himself when he became a teacher.[3] We follow the villagers along the narrow alleys between the "low sombre looking houses with closed doors."[4] We learn that the village is engulfed in darkness after sunset except for a small oil lamp here or there with its weak yellow flame.[5] We see the village folk gather on wooden benches[6] in front of their houses or on doorsteps and learn how ducks and geese share the houses of the peasant and roam about freely.[7] And we are told how young and old of both sexes bathe in the canal[8] together with their beasts, that same canal from which the village gets its water.[9] In Ahlan wa Sahlan we are given a detailed description of the village and the life of its inhabitants. Slum existence is evident. Man and beast share the same room. There is no proper bed or bedding but the roof of a warm

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1. ʿA. R. al-Sharqāwī, al-Ard, p.21.
2. Ibid., p.138.
3. Ibid., p.139.
4. Ibid., p.116.
5. Ibid., p.114.
6. Ibid., pp. 24, 74.
7. Ibid., p.123.
8. Ibid., p.7.
9. Ibid., p.150.

oven on which the whole family sleeps. There is a poor supply of water and no notions of sanitation.[1]

Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm in Yawmiyyāt Nā'ib reflects on the tedious existence of an official in a village where there is nothing but a few buildings, the majority of which are dilapidated and "these holes" with roofs of cotton and maize stalks where the peasants live. He sees in their "dusty dark colour, the colour of mud ... and the dung of beasts," and in their congestion as kafrs and 'izbas a resemblance to a "herd of cattle" sent into the fields. In the "bellies" of these "houses" live "worms of wretched peasants."[2]

Whether it is the slightly better built houses of mud bricks or the straw-mud huts, the filth and flies are part of the living conditions of the peasants. Squalor is everywhere. Improvement, however small, is not contemplated. It is too dear to whitewash a house and no attempt is made to ensure greater cleanliness. As wages are at a minimum level, food comes first. It absorbs over half of a family's meagre income. The rest goes on clothes and kerosene for fuel and lighting.[3]

Housing conditions in big cities and provincial capitals, especially in the quarters where the poor live, are no better than in the country. Unhygienic dwelling places with the strong smell of mould are part of the housing problem throughout Egyptian towns, but nowhere more so than in Cairo. Here the problem is paramount.

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1. Ḥusain Mu'nis, Ahlan wa Sahlan, p. 25.
2. T. al-Ḥakīm, Yawmiyyāt Nā'ib, p. 57.
3. 'Abbās 'Ammār, People of Sharqiyya, p. 318.

Figures show how densely populated the old quarters are. They house most of the inhabitants of Cairo. Most of them belong to low income groups - workers, servants, craftsmen, jacks-of-all-trades and many petty officials and small shopkeepers, who can ill afford anything but the cheapest of rents.[1] In the ʿAṭūf shiyākha (sub-quarter) alone, more than a quarter of a million live in a square kilometre. The whole shiyākha consists of ugly masses of compressed, dilapidated houses and hovels with a "putrid smell".[2] Worse still are the conditions of the hovels of Fāyid and Kābish and the ʿishash (rookeries) of Turjumān "the poorest dwelling places in the capital". Many of their inhabitants are destitute peasants who left Upper Egypt and came down the Nile "in search of a living".[3] The buildings in the old quarters are not only dilapidated relics, but, since they have grown haphazardly, they have no regularity and protrude into the streets, so creating irregular thorough-fares. Some of these thorough-fares do not exceed two metres in width and are intersected by a great number of unpaved and uneven alleys. Mounds of earth functioning as refuse dumps and ditches full of mud and stagnant water are part of an alley.[4]

Many of the old dwelling places, one time Mamluk palaces, now on the point of collapsing, have been condemned as unsafe and should have been demolished long ago.[5] In a recent article on housing

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1, Social Research Office, Dirāsa Ijtimāʿiyyah lil-Khidmāt bi-Ḥayy Bulāq (Cairo, 1957), p. 8.
2. Social Research Office, Dirāsa Ijtimāʿiyyah lil-Khidmāt bi-Ḥayy al-Jamāliyya (Cairo, 1958), p. 17.
3. Social Research Office, op. cit., pp. 9-10.
4. Dirāsa ... Ḥayy al-Jamāliyya, p. 211.
5. Dirāsa ... Bulāq, pp. 8-9.

conditions it was stated that the "houses that collapse are many".[1] Not a few occupants have lost their lives in the process according to the article. This is reflected in al-Saqqā Māt. Shūsha, the water-carrier, meets an untimely death, when one of these dilapidated houses in which he is living and which is full "of cracks in the walls and ceiling", falls down and buries him under the debris.[2]

The narrow tortuous streets, the countless unpaved alleys, the overcrowding and the general sense of decay are best reflected in al-Sibā'ī's al-Saqqā Māt. Here we read of pedestrians sharing a narrow path with cats, donkeys and barrows. Egyptian 'clover' and the dung of animals are found at almost every corner. Darb al-Sammākīn, one of the old slum lanes, is "narrow and filthy".[3] Shops and the houses along its sides are old and decaying. The proximity of the windows of the houses facing each other is such that "residents' hands could almost touch".[4] The darb is covered with "heaps of rubbish encircled by putrid filthy water".[5] The author stresses the point that this darb is not unique. All alleys and lanes around it share the same characteristics. The whole picture is one of squalor, darkness and the "crumbling-down look".[6]

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1. 23,000 families were evacuated during 1963-64 because their dwelling places were about to collapse. Rose al-Yūsuf, No. 2123, 17 February, 1969.
2. Y. al-Sibā'ī, al-Saqqā Māt, pp. 467-468.
3. Ibid., p. 12.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid., p. 13.
6. Ibid., p. 14.

The correctness of al-Sibāʿī's observations is confirmed by Ḥāfiẓ ʿAfīfī who, describing the dwelling conditions in Cairo district in 1938, wrote: "As a doctor who has worked in Cairo for twenty years, I do not believe there is a single corner of the capital in which I have not set foot. I have seen the narrow alleyways through which only one person can pass, whose inhabitants can jump from a house on one side to the house on the opposite side. I have been in houses from which evil and contaminating smells issue; the walls of which are damp in summer and winter. The sun does not penetrate them, there is neither air nor light within."[1] Dampness and darkness referred to by Dr. ʿAfīfī are also met with in al-Saqqā Māt and Zuqāq al-Midaqq. In the former, Shūsha has to find his way in the 'houses' of his clients through the "sense of direction, as it is impossible to see,"[2] though it is broad daylight outside. Similarly, we are told that Zaiṭa's dwelling place in the Midaqq alley is in darkness night and day. A wooden door facing the entrance opens on to a grimy little ruin smelling of earth and filth. It has only one very small window in the opposite wall overlooking the courtyard of an old house. About an arm's length from the window there is a lamp, placed on a shelf, throwing a dim light showing a floor of earth covered with countless varieties of refuse, as

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1. Ḥāfiẓ ʿAfīfī, ʿAlā Hāmish al-Siyāsa, p. 22.
2. Y. al-Sibāʿī, op. cit., p. 31.

if it were a rubbish heap."[1] Ard al-Nifāq and al-Saqqā Māt show that such features are typical of the popular areas. They all share the same quantities of decay, darkness and squalor.[2] The same point is made by al-Sibā'ī in Ard al-Nifāq when the narrator in a philanthropic mood decides to visit one of the poor quarters of Cairo. He has no difficulty in picking one, as they are "all alike". He chooses al-Qulalī for no other reason than its proximity to where he is. It does not differ from other quarters such as Būlāq, Zainhum or al-Sayyida Zainab with its "warrens", its "vegetable refuse strewn left and right", its "heaps of garbage" and its "hovels" in which the people live.[3]

The overcrowding and slum conditions of these quarters is also stressed in Dr. 'Afīfī's report. He writes that he has been to houses where roofs are made of old petrol tins, one room huts which house father, mother and children, sometimes together with animals and fowl.[4] Relatively little has changed in housing or sanitary conditions since the late 1930s and 1940s when these reports were made. According to more recent studies, dwelling places in these areas were described as "very bad" because of the overcrowding, lack of ventilation and squalor.[5]

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1. Mahfūz, Zuqāq al-Midaqq, p. 70.
2. A point stressed by studies on Jamāliyya and Būlāq quarters is "that the majority of the roads in them are not provided with any light whatsoever." Social Research Office, Dirāsa... Hayy al-Jamāliyya, p. 212; Dirāsa... Hayy Būlāq, pp. 8, 179.
3. Y. al-Sibā'ī, al-Saqqā Māt, pp. 203-205. An article written by Dr. Shawqī bears witness to the unhygienic conditions in a quarter like Būlāq which he describes a "the quarter of sweat blood and tears". Journal of the Association of University Graduates, al-Tali'a, vol. I, No. 5, 15 January, 1946.
4. Hāfiz 'Afīfī, op. cit., p. 22.
5. Social Research Office, Dirāsa... Hayy al-Jamāliyya, p. 213; Hayy Būlāq, pp. 179-180.

Filth is an integral part of these old quarters. The alley-way where Sayyid and his friends play is unpaved, muddy and damp.[1] Green mulūkhiyya[2] stalks are strewn in front of one of the houses and the remains of pressed tomatoes and other food in front of another.[3] Squares too are usually covered with rubble and garbage, old tins and people "whose clothes and skins are no less black than the fūl pots."[4] The narrator in Arḍ al-Nifāq on his "charity tour" discovers that filth is so widespread that he almost thinks of it as an "art" which the inhabitants of the hovels seem to practise. He tells of a woman sitting on the road near a wall and observes that there is "no difference between the colour of her face, her clothes and the earth."[5] In her lap lies her infant baby with inflamed eyes, flies covering its face. In front of her is a bamboo cage on which a few dirty looking sweets with flies sticking all round are put on display. A second child is crawling towards a garbage heap and finally "settles on top of it".[6] Dr. Shawqī's detailed description of the Bulāq quarter confirms the above. On the state of the children he writes: "In every alley there are scores of naked and filthy infants to be seen and you are at a loss to understand how such children remain alive.

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1. Y. al-Sibā'ī, al-Saqqā Māt, p. 86.
2. A spinach-like vegetable (Corchorus olitorius; bot.).
3. Y. al-Sibā'ī, op. cit., p. 88.
4. Ibid., p. 13.
5. Y. al-Sibā'ī, Arḍ al-Nifāq, p. 207.
6. Ibid., p. 207.

and even grow up."[1]

Such squalor, needless to say, has a brutalizing impact on the inhabitants of those areas. In addition to the injurious effect on their health, the effect on their morals is no less marked.[2] Young children living in the rookeries and hovels are expected by their jobless parents to earn money or find food in one way or another. They collect 'cigarette ends', garbage and sometimes sell lottery tickets or beg. A few fall into traps skilfully laid by criminals.[3] The deadening effect of such filthy surroundings is voiced by ʿAlī Ṣabrī, the musician and secret dealer in drugs when he tells Ḥasan of the danger lurking in the dark, congested narrow lanes. "No one knows these areas better than you. In every square metre there is a scoundrel, a lout or a drunkard. ... There are also the drugs ... and to trade in them

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1. ʿUmar Shawqī, op.cit., vol. 1, No. 5, 15 January 1946.

2. Available statistics show a high proportion of juvenile delinquency. Social welfare centres refer this to the general low standard of economy, health and education. Parents living in hovels spend most of their time struggling for a living and children are left to their own devices roaming about freely. Social Research Office, Dirāsa... Jamāliyya, p.213; also Dirāsa... Ḥayy Būlāq, pp. 9, 18.

3. In a study on the old Jamāliyya quarter, it was made clear that the Darwīshes living around the tombs, on pavements and roads of the area "constitute a danger to society". They appear in "different guises" and thus enable outlaws, criminals and drug smugglers to edge their way among them and pose as one of them. The Darrāsa hills in particular are considered a "haven" for escaped criminals and smugglers. See for detail, Social Research Office, Dirāsa... Ḥayy al-Jamāliyya, pp. 212-215.

is an immense art which requires skill, strength and boldness."[1]

Sanitary Conditions

These examples leave no doubt that sanitary conditions in general are poor. A recent article on the housing problem in Cairo stated that "the city is anaemic in public amenities". It indicates that only half the city enjoys water supply, drainage and light, The other half lives in darkness, in a terrible stench and has to buy its supply of water from the water-carrier.[2] No Edwin Chadwick (1800-1890), no Southwood Smith[3](1788-1861) appeared on the Egyptian scene to "reduce the stink". In most towns only the main streets are paved. Lanes, alley ways, courts and squares were never paved. Garbage and dung heaps and all manner of refuse were rarely cleared. Only main streets and those belonging to fashionable quarters were swept. As for the back streets, lanes and alleys, no effective measures were taken to clean them.[4] In Ard al-Nifāq, the author illustrates how indifferent authorities are to conditions prevailing in the poor quarters of Cairo. The narrator sarcastically describes one of these filthy garbage

1. Maḥfūẓ, Bidāya wa Nihāya, p. 150.
2. Rose al-Yūsuf, no. 2104, 7 October 1968.
3. Both men were at one time assistants of Bentham. They applied his principles and methods to the field of public health. Greatly interested in sanitary science, they undertook a thorough investigation into the causes of epidemics and endemics in the various slum areas. Through their combined effort they exposed "the extent and operation of the evil" and recommended improvements (drainage, removal of refuse, and an improvement of water supplies) which formed the foundation on which the great modern edifice of public health has been raised. E.R. Pike, Pioneers of Social Change (London, 1963), pp. 137 ff.
5. Social Research Office, Dirāsa... Ḥayy al-Jamāliyya, p. 211.

littered alleys as "enjoying complete independence". Why should the government trouble itself with "such rotten polluted places", he asks angrily, "such heaps of refuse", such "narrow lanes". Their long and wide luxurious cars cannot pass through them (because they are too narrow). Why should the government worry about the "mob", the "dregs" and their dwelling places and streets? Why should "al-Qulalī" be of any concern to the government when "Queen Street" hides the "ruins and relics". What are "dark holes" and "crumbling caves to them"? He asks with sarcasm. Their eyes will not fall upon the decayed places, though they are only a few feet away from the wide and magnificent streets their cars use.[1]

Towns and villages are still waiting for sanitary reform to be carried out and the enforcement of comprehensive sewerage and water supply systems based on scientific research. Cairo, in particular, is in a bad condition.[2] While refuse accumulates in the streets, squares, and lanes of the city, and walls are used as 'privies', ditches with stagnant, foul smelling water are

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1. Y. al-Sibā'ī, Ard al-Nifāq, pp. 204-208. Baer remarks that the proximity of "such slums" to wealthy districts exemplifies the polarity of social differences. See Baer, Population and Society, p. 194.
2. Rose al-Yūsuf, No. 2122, 10 February 1969, p. 23. Cairo's first municipality was established as late as 1949, when the Capitulations were finally abolished and the taxation of foreigners ceased to be a problem. The special privileges enjoyed by foreigners in Egypt had been a major factor in delaying municipal development in Egypt. For details, see M. Delcroix, "L'Institution municipale en Egypte", L'Egypte Contemporaine, 13 (1922), pp. 280-281, 283, 291; also A. Wright and H.A. Cartwright, Twentieth Century Impressions of Egypt (London, 1909), p. 90; al-Waqā'i' al-Misriyya, No. 115, September 1, 1949.

encountered in the middle of narrow twisting thoroughfares, and garbage is thrown from windows and balconies on passers-by. Cairo can only be regarded as a 'huge village'.[1] The finer aspects of the more fashionable districts with their elegant buildings and tree lined roads only accentuate the squalor of the older and densely populated quarters.

Water supply is one of the most important measures to be considered along with proper sewerage systems.[2] The improvement of the water supply in towns and cities and the introduction of clean water to the villages is most urgent, if habits of cleanliness are to be propagated and the spread of disease checked. 'Water taps' are found in the squares of the popular quarters and residents queue to fill their cans or jars. Water-carriers supply residents with the water they need. In al-Saqqā Māt, we see Shūsha and his son Sayyid going on their daily rounds, after filling their goatskins with water from the tap at the entrance of the darb.[3] Though the main events of the story occur in the twenties of this century, there is no indication that the job of a water-carrier no longer exists. The novel itself closes in the fifties. By that time, Sayyid has inherited his father's job

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1. See Social Research Office, Dirāsa . . . Hayy al-Jamāliyya, pp. 211-213.
2. In 1936, it was estimated that pure drinking water from government installation was available to about 3 million city dwellers but not to any country dwellers. After 1952, schemes for providing drinking water have benefited a number of villages. C. Issawi, Egypt in Revolution, p. 105.
3. Y. al-Sibāʿī, op. cit., p. 13.

and is in charge of the main water tap in the same darb, "sitting in the wooden kiosk as he has been for the last thirty years after his father's death while it is now the turn of his young son to carry the goatskin.[1]

In the villages "water is the first problem"[2] and the villages lucky to be on the bank of the Nile will get from it water which is "relatively unpoluted".[3] However, the majority, despite pumping stations installed in a number of villages by the government,[4] still use the irrigation canals for drinking.[5] As has been mentioned, these canals are also used for cleansing men and animals and for washing crockery, clothes and vegetables. In a relevant scene in Yawmiyyāt Nā'ib a peasant is accused of having washed his clothes in the canal and is asked to pay a fine of 20 piastres. Bewildered, the man wonders why he has to pay a fine for washing his clothes. " - Because you washed them in the canal. - Where should I wash them? The judge hesitated, thought and found no answer. He knows that these wretched beings are not provided in those villages with a pure water supply."[6]

The very poor housing and sanitary conditions do not appear to have impressed the authors, al-Sibā'ī apart, or roused them to

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1. Ibid., p. 486.
2. H. Ayrout, op. cit., p. 79.
3. Ibid., p. 80.
4. Ibid.; C. Issawi, Egypt in Revolution, p. 105.
5. Distance or lack of maintenance discourage the peasants from getting their water from these installed pumps. The present writer has come across several pumps out of use and neglected on her visit to various villages in 1965.
6. T. al-Ḥakīm, Yawmiyyāt, pp. 31-32.

expose and condemn such a highly unsatisfactory situation, despite the urgency of the question. Overcrowding, pollution, squalor, are not an issue treated in the novels. There is no indication, casual or otherwise, that public hygiene and public conveniences have been the writers' concern. Even al-Sibā'ī's indignation at the existence of such "foul quarters" does not encompass the picture as a whole. While righteously indignant at the authorities for allowing such conditions to prevail and condemning them for their selfishness, blindness and neglect, he is no less angry with the inhabitants of those areas for "wallowing in such squalor".[1] This in spite of his declaration that their condition is primarily caused "by poverty which fetters them with its chains".[2]

c. Disease

The poor sanitary conditions and deficient diet have a direct influence on the spread of disease by weakening the body's resistance. The extensive epidemics that have broken out in Egypt during the first half of the twentieth century, and particularly during the Second World War, and which have resulted in high death rate[3] are striking proof of the low standard of living of

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1. Y. al-Sibā'ī, op. cit., p. 206.
2. Ibid., p. 206.
3. Five 'catastrophic' epidemics broke out in Egypt during 1942-47; typhoid fever in 1942 in which 16,706 died, re-lapsing fever 1944 killing thousands, cholera in 1947 claiming 10,277 dead, bubonic plague in the Egyptian ports and, worst of all, the malaria epidemic affecting a quarter of a million inhabitants in Upper Egypt and killing well over 10,000, though malaria is not normally a fatal disease. See Baer, Population and Society, p. 22.

the masses and the lack of proper medical care. "Health conditions in Egypt are among the worst in the world,"[1] wrote Issawi in the early 1950s. Some schemes have been put forward to improve conditions but relatively little has been achieved. Before 1952 the attention of the government was devoted not to social research and the treatment of human disease but to the productivity of the land and research into the diseases of plants. 'Ammār's statement (1944) that "responsible authorities in Egypt are not yet fully aware of the fact that the tiller of the soil and his family are at least as important as the soil and its products"[2] gave a true description of the situation.

Poor health and health conditions in general play no part in the narrative in the majority of novels. Lack of nutritious food as has been mentioned is reflected in the general appearance of the character, the pale face, the haggard look and the emaciated arms or body. But there is no indication of their being afflicted with one of the common diseases in Egypt, or of the lack of health services, and neglect or exploitation of the sick by doctors.[3] Even such a widespread and destructive disease as bilharzia

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1. C. Issawi, Egypt at Mid-Century, p.72.
2. 'Abbās 'Ammār, People of Sharqiyya, p.284.
3. Ayrout mentions a number of cases in which doctors "exploited" the sickness of the peasants " in the most cynical fashion," or refused to attend " gravely injured " persons unless paid £E 5 in advance. See H. Ayrout, op. cit., pp. 75-76.

known as the "scourge of the countryside", is mentioned only in the novel al-Harām. Here the author - a doctor himself - depicts the effects of this disease on those afflicted, and the inadequacy of the treatment. 'Abdallāh, a young landless labourer, is slowly wasting away, as the disease undermines his whole body, rendering him weak and incapable of work.[1] At the beginning he attempts to get some treatment, but he soon gives up, for progress is little and the distance to the clinic is beyond his strength.[2] Struggle against the disease has so far not been successful. A more adequate drug is needed if treatment is to be less painful, less protracted and more satisfactory.[3] Also a better way to eradicate bilharzia than killing a number of snails has to be found. According to the U.A.R. Yearbook, 1961, no less than 17,000 km. of irrigation canals and drains were treated against bilharzia in 1960.[4]

There is a case of tuberculosis in Khān al-Khalīlī and in the novel Zainab written much earlier. In the former, the long drawn

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1. Y. Idrīs, al-Harām, pp. 88-89. Perennial irrigation brought this disease to Egypt, since it is spread by minute snails in the drainage canals in which the peasants work and wash. According to some estimates, over 75 per cent of the rural population is afflicted by it and in some delta regions all inhabitants suffer from it. The parasite is absorbed into the system through the skin and develops which induces a deficiency in absorbing an already inadequate diet. See Baer, Population and Society, p. 23; D. Warriner, Land and Poverty, p. 42; Ayrout, The Egyptian Peasant, pp. 73-74.
2. Y. Idrīs, al-Harām, p. 89.
3. A.M. Galatoli, Egypt in Mid-Passage (Cairo, 1950), p. 160.
4. U.A.R. Yb. 1961, p. 909.

and painful illness "whose cure is hopeless" we are told, is depicted in detail. The patient dies despite the attempts made to cure him. However, the illness as presented indicates an isolated case. It is not seen as the outcome of poor nutrition or bad housing. Rushdī ʿĀkif develops it as a result of dissolute living; too much drink, late nights and early mornings, when the weather is damp and cold.[1] As for Zainab, it is a case of a woman who is pining for the man she loves. She is suddenly afflicted with tuberculosis. It is a convenient device used by the author to bring her life to a tragic end, thereby arousing pity for the lovers torn asunder. The illness here is not an example of a prevalent disease caused by lack of proper food and spread because of insanitary conditions.[2]

Eye disease of one form or another from which a large number of Egyptians suffer[3] are scarcely mentioned in the novels. Blindness, semi-blindness and inflamed eyes are seen in terms of physical appearances of the characters and not as diseases resulting from malnutrition, ignorance and filth. In Qindīl Umm Hāshim, an attempt is made by the author to stress the role of ignorance in aggravating the inflammation of the girl's eyes and

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1. Maḥfūẓ, Khān al-Khalīlī, p. 202.
2. Some success has been obtained, with the help of drugs, in reducing the incidence of tuberculosis. See Issawi, Egypt in Revolution, p. 104.
3. More than 90 per cent of all Egyptians suffer from eye diseases. Baer, Population and Society, p. 23. See Ayrout, op. cit., p. 73 for details.

impairing her eyesight.[1] Ṭāhā Ḥusain in al-Ayyām, reflecting on his blindness, also hints at the ineffectiveness of the treatment he received because of lack of knowledge. He relates how his sister would place him on the ground with his head on the thigh of his mother, who would then open his weak eyes one by one and "drop into them a liquid which hurt him but did him no good."[2]

Malaria spread by the "ricefields and the ponds" affecting some 65 to 90 per cent[3] of the peasant population, and ancylostoma, a collective disease like bilharzia, sapping the strength and health of those stricken,[4] find no place in the novels studied. Nor is there any interest shown in preventive measures taken or that ought to be adopted to check the spread of a disease, or in vital questions associated with public health. One may well wonder why such an important issue as health conditions in Egypt or the prevelance of endemic diseases has not been given proper consideration by the novelists. Could it be that they share the common belief that disease and illness are a visitation from God, an affliction caused by the Almighty to try the loyalty of His subjects and measure the scope of their patience and endurance? Or is it that they regard it as no concern of theirs to depict or expose the seriousness of the situation? (Ṭāhā Ḥusain in al-Ayyām[5] is an exception.)

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1. Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī, Qindīl Umm Hāshim, pp. 39-41.
2. Ṭāhā Ḥusain, al-Ayyām, vol. I, p. 6.
3. H. Ayrout, op. cit., p. 74.
4. Ibid., p. 74.
5. Ṭāhā Ḥusain, al-Ayyām, I, pp. 120 ff.

Addiction to hashīsh is reflected more freely in a number of novels. In Khān al-Khalīlī an interesting picture of "a hashīsh gathering" is drawn. We follow the narghile on its round, each person inhaling deeply when his turn comes. We hear of the strange and strong smell of this "frightening wonderful drug". We listen to an addict demanding silence because hashīsh is a sultan who requires calm and quiet, so that the effect of the drug can reach its height and man can relax and dream of having solved all his problems.[1] In al-Saqqā Māt hashīsh appears to be taken as a kind of sexual stimulant[2] with other ingredients. This is a common belief among the populace who consider it as a remedy for the loss of vitality, especially sexual virility.[3] However, hashīsh or any other drug addiction is not treated as a problem. The reader is given no hint of how widespread this practice is, nor are poverty and the miserable condition of the masses represented as the main reason for seeking oblivion by taking hashīsh.

Migration

The housing problem and the unhygienic conditions prevailing in the town were further aggravated by the steady influx of the

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1. Y. Maḥfūẓ, Khān al-Khalīlī, pp. 188-189.
2. Y. al-Sibāʿī, al-Saqqā Māt, p. 322.
3. See Issawi, Egypt at Mid-Century, p. 65.

rural population. Though Egypt has not yet gone through an industrial revolution which, as in the case of England, caused the migration of whole families from the agricultural districts to centres of industry, nevertheless, there is an incessant flow of impoverished landless labourers from the rural areas to the towns. Since the Delta region was more industrialized and less densely populated than Upper Egypt a steady stream of Ṣaʿīdīs migrated to it. However, migration was not confined to the Ṣaʿīdīs. The bad conditions and near starvation level of existence drove many peasants from their villages to nearby towns in search of a living. Some 30,000 villagers drifted yearly from their villages to the towns between 1917-1937.[1] The real influx to towns in the Delta occurred during the war years. Opportunities for employment increased because of the Allied armies stationed in Egypt. About 200,000 Egyptians were employed in their workshops and camps.[2] The attraction these centres had for the poor is depicted to some extent in Zuqāq al-Midaqq. Young men, with no work, not only from the rural areas but from Cairo as well see in the war a "heaven sent opportunity to better their conditions and improve their standard of living. Ḥusain Kirsha, the son of the "café" owner, to

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1. Population in cities like Cairo and Alexandria rose from 791,000 to 1,312,000 and from 445,000 to 686,000 representing an increase of 66 and 55 per cent respectively, compared with 25 per cent, for the country as a whole. C. Issawi, Egypt at Mid-Century, p. 60.
2. The population of Cairo, Alexandria, Damietta, the Canal Zone and Suez rose from 2,249,000 in 1937 to 3,416,000 in 1947. Ibid., pp. 60, 141.

whom the alley represents stagnation and death, tries hard to persuade the content and unambitious ʿAbbās to follow in his footsteps and "take off the gown of this squalid life" and go to the English army. He paints a rosy prospect by telling ʿAbbās that "The English army is an inexhaustible treasure."[1] Even girls from the popular areas like al-Darrāsa, broke age-old traditions, and went to work during the war years. The picture drawn of them in Zuqāq al-Midaqq presents them as "thriving on work". They no longer feel hungry as before and they are better dressed.[2]

However, there is a darker side to this picture. Not all girls get a 'respectable' job. The presence of foreign troops with money to squander tempts many a hungry servant girl or famished peasant woman to take up prostitution as a profession. As reflected in the novels, it is considered a quick escape from an impoverished existence.[3] Procurers flourish. They set up a successful business trading in human flesh.[4] Ḥamīda, attractive, clever and ambitious but discontented with her existence in the close, dull and poor alley, is lured away by such a procurer to his "school".[5] When she is willing to yield to him he restrains himself because "an American would

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1. Maḥfūẓ, Zuqāq al-Midaqq, p. 46.
2. Ibid., p. 52.
3. Maḥfūẓ, Khān al-Khalīlī, p. 127; al-Qāhira al-Jadīda, p. 28.
4. Maḥfūẓ, Zuqāq al-Midaqq, p. 247.
5. Ibid.

gladly pay £E50 in order to sleep with a virgin".[1]

The enormous influx from the country during the war period had dreadful consequences in cities like Cairo and Alexandria and posed a real threat to public health. Very low standards of health and morals were recorded among the inhabitants of overcrowded hovels.[2]

Cairo suffered most. There had been a constant drift to the city since the First World War and its popular quarters were already overcrowded. The creation of new slums only added to the dirt and aggravated the housing problem and the unwholesomeness of large areas. The fact that Cairo was not only an 'industrial centre' but the centre of administration, of cultural institutions, and various economic activities, gave it a unique attraction and drew people from the most remote villages. To the majority of villages in al-Arḍ it offers a fantastic escape from a wretched existence. It is always spoken of with admiration and longing and is often addressed as if a lover were speaking to his beloved, for "the one who built Maṣr was originally a confectioner."[3] Greetings and good wishes are sent to Cairo whenever someone from the village leaves for Cairo. To the inhabitants of the remote village of

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1. Maḥfūẓ, Zuqāq al-Midaqq, p. 247.
2. Social Research Office, Dirasa ... Ḥayy Bulāq, p. 16; also, Ḥayy al-Jamāliyya, p. 213.
3. 'A.R. al-Sharqāwī, al-Arḍ, p. 349.

Kafr Suhail "Cairo is where the King, the pashas, the beys and governors live."[1] It is the centre of power where important decisions are made concerning them and their land. The same picture of the capital is reflected in al-Ard.[2] It also represents to all the centre of education where a number of their brighter, better off and 'luckier' children go to continue their studies.[3]

The capital holds another most powerful attraction for millions of the rural masses. It is the most important religious centre.[4] A main aim for going to the city is to visit the holy shrines of al-Ḥusain and al-Sayyida Zainab. Prayers and invocations for the dead and the living get an added significance and sacredness when performed in one or both of these places.[5] Rushdī ʿĀkif in Khān al-Khalīlī sums up what Cairo means to a Cairene who is employed in a place in Egypt other than Cairo. "It is," he says, "one of God's blessings. It is the world and it is religion; it is day and it is night, hell and heaven, east and west."[6]

With all these attractions to its advantage, the destitute villager conjures up a picture of plenty and comfortable living. He believes that it cannot but provide him with wider and better opportunities than his village can offer. He has nothing to lose anyway, and this new world, this "Masr" which he seriously believes

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1. Ḥ. Mu'nis, Ahlan wa Sahlan, p. 47.
2. al-Sharqāwī, op. cit., pp. 138, 142, 143, 349.
3. Ibid., p. 22; also Ṭāhā Ḥusain, al-Ayyām, I, pp. 68, 138.
4. See Ṭāhā Ḥusain, al-Ayyām, I, p. 64.
5. ʿA.R. al-Sharqāwī, al-Ard, p. 143.
6. Maḥfūẓ, Khān al-Khalīlī, p. 116.

to be "the mother of the world" (Umm al-Dunyā) holds rich prospects in view. During the short lived boom periods the influx did not appear to constitute a problem. But once the war was over, or the building, or road construction programme was completed, the workers were dismissed and found themselves in a similar situation to the one they had fled from, if not worse.[1] Their number was far greater than could be absorbed by ordinary employment. Widespread depression settled heavily on the ever-swelling ranks of the unemployed, 'new' urban dwellers. Ḥusain Kirsha reflects the bitterness of those workers whose vices were dispensed with at the end of the war.[2] He feels desperate. Nothing is left for him but to go back to the life he loathes in the alley which "holds nothing but death."[3] Even so, Ḥusain Kirsha is luckier than most. He has what could be called a 'home' to return to. Others have to be content with hovels as more sanitary dwellings are quite outside their economic reach.

It is regrettable that the novelists have nothing to say on the subject of migration. There is no mention of the continuous drift from the countryside to the towns. Nor is there a hint of the serious consequences of such an influx or the underlying factors which bring it about. The cleavage between the relatively more prosperous north (Delta region) and the poverty stricken south,

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1. ʿA.R. al-Sharqāwī, al-Arḍ, p. 6.
2. Maḥfūẓ, Zuqāq al-Midaqq, p. 26.
3. Ibid., p. 45.

the cleavage between the countryside and the town and the cleavage within the town itself, the causes and effects of the migration appear to have escaped the notice of most of them.

d. Natural Increase and Birth Control

The poverty of the peasant which underlay his migration to the towns was further worsened by the high birth rate. From the second decade of the twentieth century the increase in Egypt's population began to outpace the increase in farmland.[1] The rural 'surplus' forced down the rural standard of living.[2] The gravity of the problem of the rapid rate of population growth has never been denied by economists and historians. Baer writes: ". . . the extent of the Egyptian population and the rate of natural increase are very great when set against economic resources and potentialities."[3]

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1. The increase of the cropped area, from 1881 to 1913, was 25 per cent, while the increase of population in the period 1897 to 1917 was 30 per cent. Population increased by 33 per cent (from 12 to 16 million) during the period 1912 to 1938, but the crop area increased only by about 10 per cent. D. Warriner, Land and Poverty, pp. 31-32; "The amount of land (cropped area) per cultivator in 1960-62 was probably something like 50 per cent less than in 1821." Patrick O'Brien, "The long-term growth of agricultural production in Egypt: 1821-1962", Political and Social Change in Modern Egypt, ed. P.M. Holt, p. 194.
2. Baer, Population and Society, pp. 26-27.
3. Ibid., p. 26. "The density of population of agricultural areas of Egypt is much greater than that of industrial countries of Europe." Cleland assessed that the present (late 1930s) output could be maintained with half the farm labour, or even less, and this without any change in the methods of cultivation. W. Wendall Cleland, "A Population Plan for Egypt". L'Égypte Contemporaine, May, 1930, p. 471; also see Issawi, Egypt at Mid-Century, pp. 241-242.

Accordingly, he sees that Egypt can only achieve a better standard of living through birth control and increased production. This viewpoint is supported by both Miss Warriner and Issawi.[1]

No decisive steps have been taken in the meanwhile to stop what Khalid M. Khalid called "this torrent, this deluge of human flesh".[2] It is not an easy problem to solve, as it would entail radical changes in both the economic and social spheres. A rise in the income of the masses is imperative; a vigorous campaign against deeply rooted traditions and customs and class ignorance has to be launched if birth control is to succeed.[3] Interest in birth control was shown by the government after 1952. However, it never achieved anything because of its shifting policy. It oscillated between advocating birth control and then discouraging it.[4] The question itself was never tackled by the authorities

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1. D. Warriner, Land and Poverty, p. 33; C. Issawi, Egypt at Mid-Century, p. 61; Egypt in Revolution, p. 303. The old régime, interested in cheap man-power for the benefit of the landowners and leading industrialists, argued in favour of ratural increase under the pretext of "in the struggle for survival, the strong wins and the small nations are strargled". See M.A. 'Allūba, Mabādi' fī al-Siyāsa al-Misrīyya, pp. 22, 228; also, H. 'Afīfī, 'Alā Hāmish al-Siyāsa, pp. 166-167.
2. Khālid M. Khālid, From Here We Start, p. 109.
3. ". . . any programme for birth control has to contend with the ignorance of the fellah, his desire for many children as working hands, the social status and security of large families and the woman's fear of divorce." Baer, Population and Society, p. 31.
4. C. Issawi, Egypt in Revolution, p. 302.

at the fundamental level. The economic and/or social conditions of the masses were not taken into consideration.[1]

A curious silence reigns in the novels over the question of the large number of children per family. Despite the seriousness of the problem and the consequences of the rapid growth of the population pointed out by economists large families remained on the whole an untouched issue, except for al-Sibā'ī in Ard al-Nifāq. A casual reference in Zuqāq al-Midaqq[2] to the begetting of children without considering the future is of little significance. Ard al-Nifāq is the only novel relevant to this study in which the author sees the problem as "one of the many evils which burden this country",[3] and condemns the irresponsible attitude of the parents concerned. The narrator tells us of a poor relative of his who is "afflicted with a disease". The disease turns out to be "reproduction", the "malady of sons and daughters".[4] He agrees with the Qur'anic verse that "wealth and children are the ornament of life on earth."[5] But he questions the wisdom of begetting children without having any wealth, just children, and wonders whether in the latter case they can be considered a blessing and an ornament on earth. To him the irony lies in the incongruity between wealth and the number of children. It is evident, he observes,

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1. Ibid., p. 302. Issawi tells how a doctor in charge of one of the rural social centres was consulted by the peasants on means of having more children, not less. Similarly the present writer was informed by a number of officials, taxi-drivers, men-servants, barbers, and a number of peasants of their pride and desire for a large number of children.
2. Maḥfūẓ, Zuqāq al-Midaqq, p. 172.
3. Y. al-Sibā'ī, Ard al-Nifāq, p. 254.
4. Ibid., p. 253.
5. Ibid.

that a man's wealth corresponds inversely to the number of his children. The richer he is the fewer children he has,[1] whilst the problem is at its most intense in the lower strata of society. Here they reproduce regardless of what the future may hold for all their offspring.[2] It does not trouble them to see their children "increase like ants" for they rely on the providence of God. He "will provide for them."[3] The irresponsible attitude of the parents is stressed. He relates how this relative of his, a clerk, saw in marriage the fulfilment of "half his religion", and believed in performing his duty as a husband. The rest depended on God.[4] We are told that with the arrival of each new mouth, his expenditure increased but not his income. As the children grow, so do their expenses. The whole situation becomes unbearable. To mitigate the harshness of the conditions under which the family has come to live, the eldest son, an intelligent and diligent youth, is obliged to interrupt his studies in order to earn some money to help with the family budget.[5]

It was the children who suffered most. They bore the brunt of their parents' poverty, ignorance and conventional attitudes. They felt cheated of what should have been their right had conditions within the family and within society been different.[6] The plight

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1. Ibid., p. 254.
2. Ibid., p. 255.
3. Ibid., p. 255.
4. Ibid., pp. 258-259.
5. Ibid., p. 260.
6. Maḥfūẓ, Bidāya wa Nihāya, pp. 183, 191; al-Qāhira al-Jadīda, p. 41.

of the countless children of the unemployed workers and those who scrape a living through attempting various makeshift jobs among the lower classes was worse, and their prospects of a better life dim. Their sentiments are rarely voiced in the novels. It is only through the general atmosphere of the narrative that the reader draws the former conclusion. Their playground is the street or alleyways. Schools are only occasionally attended despite the law that makes elementary education compulsory, for they either help their parents in the work, as in the rural areas, or have to earn their living, as among the urban poor. ʿAbd al-Hādī remembers how he used to carry his small axe to the field when he was a child.[1] Sayyid leaves school to help his father, the water-carrier, on his rounds.[2] Khadra as a child goes to pick cotton,[3] and in the village of Kafr Suhail, children are gathered from all over the village to fill the one room and give the impression of being proper school children on the appointed day of the King's visit.[4] Others in the cities and towns constitute the many errand boys, the apprentices to the tailors, shirtmakers and suitpressers; the shoeshiners, hawkers and pedlars and the many servant girls. Not a few are trained as we learn in Arḍ al-Nifāq, to be convincing beggars, by veterans in the 'trade'.[5]

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1. ʿA.R. al-Sharqāwī, al-Arḍ, p. 55.
2. Y. al-Sibāʿī, al-Saqqā Māt, p. 24.
3. ʿA.R. al-Sharqāwī, op. cit., p. 9.
4. Ḥusain Muʿnis, Ahlan wa Sahlan, p. 427.
5. Y. al-Sibāʿī, Arḍ al-Nifāq, p. 241.

As has been noted earlier some came under the evil influence of hardened criminals.[1] Many an 'artful Dodger' was created by men who lacked neither the experience nor the shrewdness of a 'Fagin'.

"In Egypt", writes ʿAbd al-Majīd Nāfiʿ, "statistics tell us that the majority of crimes and felonies are caused by poverty and ignorance."[2] This is reflected in most of the cases recorded by T. al-Hakīm in Yawmiyyāt Nā'ib. Unemployment and lack of opportunities for work for the ever-growing population brought in their train physical and moral degradation. However, crime as a social evil receives almost no treatment by the novelists. In Yawmiyyāt, T. al-Ḥakīm talks about the hired killer, and how he as a professional "carries his gun as the artist carries his violin."[3] Very little is said of the private vendetta which is still as frequent and as violent as ever.[4] Ḥusain Mu'nis refers to the insecurity a person feels when walking at night in a village. "You cannot safely turn your back on any man with a gun . . . 99 per cent of those killed by bullets in the countryside are hit in their backs . . . ."[5] Certain slum sectors were the haunts of gangs who lived mainly on drug traffic and sex-mongering. In Bidāya wa Nihāya we learn how Ḥasan is almost coshed to death by other

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1. ʿAbd al-Majīd Nāfiʿ, al-Salām al-Ijtimāʿī, p. 70.
2. Ibid.
3. T. al-Ḥakim, Yawmiyyāt Nā'ib, p. 126.
4. H. Ayrout, The Egyptian Peasant, p. 111.
5. Ḥusain Mu'nis, Ahlan wa Sahlan, p. 77.

members of the gang trafficking in drugs. He tries hard to evade the police so as to take revenge.[1] Though T. al-Ḥakīm refers to the widespread crime in Upper Egypt represented in a place called "Abnūb" which was considered only second to Chicago in the world of crime according to a report issued in Europe and America,[2] he does not deal with the question of crime in any depth, nor do the rest of the novelists when the opportunity presents itself to them.

e. Fatalism and Apathy

Poverty, oppression and tradition reduced the masses to such a level of mental degradation that it rendered them insensible to the higher aspirations of life. Comparing the Egyptian rural masses to peasants of other civilized countries from the spiritual and cultural point of view, Ayrout states that "nowhere is such social resignation, such political deficiency to be found, nor above all the strange self-denial which causes the fellah to despise his work and way of life.[3] Unconscious of their fundamental contribution to the nation's livelihood, they have nothing to elevate and sustain them. They have become indifferent and resigned. Belief in God and His will softens their misery and the hardships they encounter and helps them to accept their lot contentedly. Any blow dealt them by the vicissitudes of life is explained away as decreed by God who alone in His wisdom knows the reason for it.

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1. Maḥfūẓ, Bidāya wa Nihāya, pp. 352-54.
2. T. al-Ḥakīm, Yawmiyyāt, pp. 164-165.
3. H. Ayrout, op. cit., p. 152.

Phrases like 'It is God's will' or 'It is God's decree, we have no power to do anything', are common among the masses in difficult situations. They act like a soothing drug, absolving them from personal thinking. The blow young Sayyid receives when he learns of his father's sudden and untimely death is softened to a large degree by the belief that what has happened is "God's decree" and "what can we do about it."[1] Verses from the Qur'ān are recited to this purport urging patience and resignation to the inevitable. "And those who are patient in prosperity and calamity they are the ones who are true, they are the pious."[2] Consequently, it occurs to no one to question the cause of Shūsha's death. No one sees in poverty the main cause of the water-carrier's tragic end. His very low income forces him to live in one of the damp, unwholesome dwellings, sadly in need of repair, which eventually collapses and crushes him.[3]

The contentment of the masses with their lot is amply depicted in the novels. One or two random examples will suffice to illustrate this. In Zuqāq al-Midaqq all the inhabitants of the alley with the exception of Ḥusain Kirsha and Ḥamīda, show no discontent with their lot. They do not grumble for "good is that which God has chosen" (for them). This is although the alley is dull, and "contains nothing but death"[4] according to Ḥusain Kirsha.

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1. Y. al-Sibā'ī, al-Saqqā Māt, p.471.
2. Ibid., p.477.
3. Ibid., pp. 467-468.
4. Maḥfūẓ, Zuqāq al-Midaqq, p.45.

'Abbās, the barber, is reluctant to leave and try his fortune elsewhere, though he knows that he has gained nothing from the alley in all the twenty five years of his life. His "palm" does not receive more "than the price of a loaf of bread".[1] But he loves the alley and "prefers it to the whole world."[2]

The characters in al-Saqqā Māt, the labouring poor, are always praising God no matter what ill befalls them.[3] In an interesting argument between father and son, Sayyid and Shūsha, on the wrongs of 'stealing', little Sayyid cannot understand how God could get angry with him for taking something from those who have more than they need, to give to those who are in great need of it. He sees the whole issue as lending God a helping hand in distributing his provisions.[4] His father gives the typical explanation of the poor for their position in life. He stresses that "God knows best how to distribute wealth unto His slaves" and that it is not a question of having more and not having, but that "for each is that which God has granted", and that their duty in this life is to accept and tolerate their lot.[5]

Accordingly, the ambitions of the poor are limited and they are easily pleased. Shūsha's utmost dream is to be in charge of the water cock in the square, which he considers his right. When

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1. Ibid., p. 49.
2. Ibid., p. 109.
3. Y. al-Sibā'ī, al-Saqqā Māt, p. 27.
4. Ibid., p. 42.
5. Ibid., p. 43.

this dream is realized he and little Sayyid are beside themselves with pride and joy.[1] ʿAbbās in Zuqāq al-Midaqq goes to work with the British army after much persuasion from his friend Ḥusain, but only to gratify the wishes of Ḥamīda his fiancée to whom money means a great deal.[2] The general impression the reader gets from the novels is that all the poor are asking for, is al-sitr, just enough to cover their bare necessities of life. Rarely do they dream of a better life or aspire to the comforts and luxuries of the rich. Their social attitude is affected by their religion. They accept their position in life and their misery as part of what is decreed for them and, as Shūsha explains, perform their duties faithfully and yield to the will of God. With the rare exception of a number of peasants in al-Ard, the inequalities and wrongs they experience are not questioned.

Man's belief in his impotence in the face of a pre-ordained fate, led him to resort to supernatural powers, through whose intervention he hoped to alleviate or escape his dreary existence. Hence the widespread belief in the jinn and the ʿifrīts, and their powers to realize man's dreams. Hence too the efficacy ascribed to charms in warding off evil or ensuring the fulfilment of a wish.[3] The existence of one or more shrines in a village or in the poor quarters of a town indicates the strong belief still persisting in mediation of saints.[4]

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1. Ibid., p.395.
2. Maḥfūẓ, Zuqāq al-Midaqq, pp. 107-109.
3. T. al-Ḥakīm, ʿAudat al-Ruḥ, p.73; H. Ayrout, op.cit., p.100.
4. In most of the novels concerned these shrines are mentioned.

The superstitious practices pervading the lives of the masses and the prestige of "pious-seeming charlatans"[1] are all signs that the thinking of the average Egyptians "is too far removed from that pattern which we call scientific".[2] Moreover, the policy of leaving the masses in their ignorance was in keeping with the interests of the ruling class. ʿAbd al-Majīd Nāfiʿ, the lawyer, relates how, when he called for the economic liberation of the peasant, a 'man' told him with great impudence that such an attitude would only have "dire consequences" for the peasant. "The peasant is satisfied with his lot" he said, "whilst you are urging him to anger and complaint and these are the first signs of awakening and rebellion. You are depriving him of his religious emotion, which trains him to be content and resigned. Were the peasant to know his rights, we would no longer be able to govern him."[3] The Constitution of 1923 decreed that elementary education should be compulsory, but the economic standard of the masses proved too great an obstacle for the law to have any significant effect.[4]

The subject of education will be discussed in detail in a later chapter. Suffice it to say here that, despite the increase in the number of schools and staff, the poor on the whole and the rural communities in particular, could not afford to keep their

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1. H. Ayrout, op. cit., p. 141.
2. A.F. Radwan, Old and New Forces in Egyptian Education, p. 138.
3. ʿAbd al-Majīd Nāfiʿ, al-Salām al-Ijtimāʿī, pp. 11-12.
4. H. Ayrout, op. cit., p. 126. "In 1950', writes Ayrout, 'in one village of 27,000 one postman was sufficient to deliver the mail - about thirty letters and ten papers or magazines." p. 126.

children from work. Those who managed to go benefited little. The quality of the schools was poor and the pupils who finished the course could go no further. The little they learnt was soon forgotten.[1]

The ignorance of the masses was responsible for much of their suffering and their fear. In Qindīl Umm Hāshim the girl almost loses her eyesight because they prefer her to be treated with the "holy oil", rather than by proper medicine.[2] In al-Ard the wounded are advised to put "earth" on the wound, for "earth is healing". The shopkeeper tells them to use "ground coffee" instead. The idea of going to a doctor is greeted with laughter and disdain.[3] Belief in antiquated methods rather than modern scientific ones is vividly illustrated in the case of the mid-wife in Yawmiyyāt Nā'ib. Here the hospital doctor relates to the public prosecutor how he was once called to a case of "difficult labour". He hurried to the place and found an old "red eyed" woman sitting close to the woman in labour. He was told that she was the mid-wife and that the "woman" had been in this state for three days. "Why have you waited all this time and not called a doctor?" he inquired. "We were waiting our Lord's sitr" she answered. "We said, the Master will see her through safely."[4] The doctor then put his hand into the woman's womb and found it full of

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1. For details see Issawi, Egypt at Mid-Century, p. 67; Egypt in Revolution, p. 97; H. Ayrout, op. cit., pp. 126-127.
2. Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī, Qindīl Umm Hāshim, p. 40.
3. ʿA.R. al-Sharqāwī, al-Ard, pp. 184-186.
4. T. al-Ḥakīm, Yawmiyyāt Nā'ib, p. 106.

straw. He asked the mid-wife for an explanation. "My hand slipped when I tried to pull the child, so I said, I'll rub it with some straw."[1] The author realizes that "the human being is of no value in Egypt", because those in charge who have to think about these souls do not do so.[2]

Throughout the Yawmiyyāt, since it is a record of actual incidents happening in the life of a public prosecutor, the ignorance of the peasants, their misery and backwardness are amply reflected. Here they are with their fear and mistrust, their defiance. their cunning and their childlike credulity. Their outlook is well illustrated in the way they attempt to defend themselves before the judge or explain their grievances or deal with a situation. Their irrational approach, their shortsightedness, apathy and fatalistic attitude are all evident.

Attitude of the Authors

Muḥammad Ḥusain Haykal in Zainab describes in one passage the exploitation of the peasants by the landlords. "They work continuously and watch with their own eyes the bright results of their work, only to see its fruit going to the owner who thinks of selling his cotton at the highest possible price and letting his land at the highest value."[3] A condemnation of the exploiters

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1. Ibid., p.106.
2. Ibid., p.107.
3. M. Ḥusain Haykal, Zainab, p. 22.

is what a reader expects to follow or an expression of the writer's views on the agricultural question. No such opinions are forthcoming. In class and habits of thought Haykal was without doubt on the side of the landlords.[1] He justifies their attitude and behaviour towards the peasants by explaining it away as a matter of custom. The landowner "lives as his forefathers lived, adhering to the old and not thinking of changing any of his ancestors' customs."[2] The novel gives a comprehensive picture of the countryside, the landscape, the beasts, the crops, the toiling, impoverished peasant labourer and the well-to-do landowner. But the poverty of the peasant is not questioned nor its underlying causes considered, let alone revealed. The bad conditions of the peasantry are rather glossed over by an overemphasis on the scenery. The narrative is infused with the beauty and tranquility of the countryside. The misery of the peasants is to a great extent overlooked. Instead, they are portrayed as content with their lot. Worse still is the impression that the beauty of the village is derived from this contentment. For the peasants have toiled like slaves for so long under the blazing sun that "they have got accustomed to it like their fathers before them."[3] However, there

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1. Ḥusain Haykal was strongly opposed to land reform. As president of the Liberal Constitutional Party, explaining its programme in August 1952, he made it clear that "the limiting of private property is a delicate matter that would be likely to provoke class war. I do not believe that the Government will put its very existence in jeopardy by urging legislation which the country as a whole rejects." "Mabādi' ḥizb al-aḥrār al-dustūriyyīn fī al-'ahd al-jadīd, 16, al-Ahrām, 7 August 1952.
2. Ḥusain Haykal, op.cit., p.22.
3. Ibid., p.22.

is no indication in the novel that no matter how much the peasant is "accustomed" to his slavery it does not make his misery any less acute, or relieve those in charge of their responsibility to improve his condition.

A similar outlook is al-Ḥakīm's in ʿAudat al-Rūḥ. Through the eyes of the youth Muḥsin, the landowner's son, the peasants appear to have no problems. Their backbreaking work is but "love and care for the worshipped harvest".[1] Their "faded blue garments" reflect the serenity of the sky[2], and their singing celebrates the birth of the sun in the way their ancestors did in the temples, or their joy for the harvest, their "idol of today".[3] Their miserable insanitary living conditions are completely overlooked and their sharing their huts with animals is explained as perfect harmony between man and beast,[4] and a sign of knowledge.[5] There is no mention of the wretched humans controlled and driven by cotton proprietors and foreign entrepreneurs who prosper on their misery. T. al-Ḥakīm's interpretation of the building of the pyramids by the peasants defies all logic. He sees them working for 20 years with "smiling lips and joyfull hearts" carrying on their shoulders the huge stones, "accepting the pain for the sake of the idol", looking at "the blood dropping from their bodies with gladness".[6] However, in Yawmiyyāt he modifies this unrealistic outlook

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1. T. al-Ḥakīm, ʿAudat al-Rūḥ, vol. II, p. 37.
2. Ibid., p. 53.
3. Ibid., p. 37.
4. Ibid., pp. 31-33.
5. Ibid., p. 54.
6. Ibid., p. 60.

and appears to stand with his feet more firmly on the ground. Though the poverty of the rural masses is not an issue that appears to interest him, nevertheless a more realistic picture emerges of the wretched condition of the peasants, as previous examples have illustrated.

Though the spectacle of agrarian Egypt aroused the conscience of a few writers, especially after 1936, and though the Ministry of Social Welfare was set up in 1938, apparently to look into the problem of the peasant, the agrarian question with all its complexities did not engage the minds of the novelists in the same way. No reaction to the problem can be discerned in the novels of that period. The two novels dealing with the rural masses were written after 1952. By that time the land question had been taken up by the new regime and certain measures of reform introduced.[1] In this case, one cannot say that the novelists initiated any ideas, especially as both novels depict the rural masses under the old regime, when the reign of the landlords was supreme. Despite the gap in time and the topicality of the theme, apart from casual remarks made by peasants about the small size of the patches of land they own (e.g. al-Ard) compared with the numerous acres belonging to the Pasha, the distribution of land as the major cause of the peasant's poverty is ignored. In al-Ḥarām, Yūsuf Idrīs takes up the case of the most downtrodden of peasants, the 'wandering labourer', the tarḥīla. His picture is not a bright

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1. See Baer, Population and Society, for details, pp. 155-156.

one. He presents them as "the poorest who are driven by want to seek work in faraway provinces, leaving their homes and villages for the sake of a daily wage not exceeding a few piastres".[1] A feature is made of their struggle for existence, but there is no indication of the cause of their poverty. The link between the poverty of these landless labourers and the existence of vast estates owned by the one man who can employ dozens of these 'hands' and keep clerks and overseers, is missed. Nor is contrast intended in the picture of the two 'parties'. Light is shed on the way of life and behaviour of the tarḥīla and their poverty is seen as part of that life.

Sharqāwī's al-Arḍ though the best written novel on the peasants so far, with its detailed picture of their lives, their way of thinking and their struggle against oppression and exploitation fails to reveal explicitly and in a constructive way the link between the peasant's want and the prevailing system. The problem as stated in the novel springs from a change in the governing party. The King's party, the Sha'b has taken over the government from the Wafd. This outlook appears strange when it is remembered that the Wafd included a number of the biggest land-owners in Egypt who were strong opponents of land reform.[2]

The fact that both the urban poor and the peasants were victims of fundamentally the same evil, the extremely uneven

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1. Y. Idrīs, al-Ḥarām, p. 17.
2. Baer, Landownership, pp. 205-210; Issawi, Egypt at Mid-Century, p. 261.

distribution of land, went unnoticed. Their wretched living conditions were to a certain extent portrayed by al-Sibā'ī. But as already mentioned, though the picture of the slums he depicts is very realistic, he is strangely inconsistent in his reasoning and his demands. He points out that the 'poverty' of the slum dwellers acts like a chain, yet asks the "people of squalor" to get rid of the filth "for it will cost you nothing, nothing more than getting accustomed to cleanliness."[1] His indignation against such conditions exhibits concern, a welcome sign in any artist. But not so his assumption "that cleanliness costs nothing".

It is difficult to explain the curious absence in Maḥfūẓ's novels of any mention of the overcrowding and the insanitary conditions prevailing in the old quarters of Cairo. This, when the background against which the majority of his characters move is old and popular Cairo as most of the titles of the novels indicate.

To sum up, the question of poverty has been neither comprehensively nor profoundly treated by the novelists. The cause of the poor, rural and urban, is not championed. Their plight is not emphasised. When placed against the upper class with its wealth and finery the contrast is too feeble, to make any impact. During the period in which the novels concerned were written (1919-1960) the poverty of the masses became an urgent question. Agrarian reform was hotly debated in Parliament during and after the Second

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1. Y. al-Sibā'ī, Arḍ al-Nifāq, p. 209.

World War. The population grew rapidly, lowering still further the standard of living of the masses. The rural surplus swarmed into towns in search of work. Peasants according to their place of origin grouped themselves in various quarters of the capital[1] retaining their village ways, and forming a parasitic mass which was "never absorbed by the city".[2] Their living conditions were appalling and their ignorance abysmal. It was a rich world for an observant man to write about. Surprisingly enough the response of the novelists was slight. Consequently their indignation is not aroused against poverty and the ills it caused, let alone the social wrong attacked, apart from a very few isolated outbursts. When pity is felt for the destitute and helpless, the system is not blamed. Suggestions for ameliorating what a few saw of the intolerable conditions are mostly confined to advocating charity and a change of heart.

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1. H. Ayrout, op. cit., p. 151.
2. Ibid.

PART II

THE RICH

The term 'Rich' in this chapter is used to designate that section of Egyptian society which owned most of the country's wealth in the first half of the twentieth century, namely, the great landlords. This group was interwoven with the group of large-scale merchants who began toacquire large estates when they saw that investment in land would be profitable as agricultural development was speeded up at the turn of the nineteenth century. From the early thirties of the twentieth century, a smaller group of contractors and industrialists penetrated the former land-owning group.[1]

It may be argued that the landed rich in Egypt were no true aristocrats in the European sense of the word, as were the French, German and British landed aristocracy. They were not a landed nobility deeply rooted in the soil. As noted earlier in the discussion of land tenure, they were formed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Their manner of formation explains the urban nature of this group.[2] Suffice it here to say that neither ruler (Khedive or King), the biggest landowner in the country, nor the Turco-Egyptian élite, known among the people as the dhawāt,[3] and the most important

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1. Baer, Landownership, pp. 138-42.
2. Ibid., pp. 40 ff.
3. " ... Zawat, or official personage who are landed proprietors without being omdehs." Mackenzie Wallace, Egypt and the Egyptian Question (London, 1883), pp. 214, 311.

landowners before 1880, had any link with the land. As for the very few large landowners whose ancestors had been village notables in the middle of the nineteenth century, the greater part of their property was accumulated in the twentieth century after they had already moved to the towns.[1] Ayrout, discussing the relationship between landowner and the land, writes: "Between him and the land there is no tangible link, no tradition which attracts him to any village."[2] He points out that "even when the landowner is of fellah origin . . . he takes no interest in the ʿizba except as a source of income."[3]

The term dhawāt as used by the novelists in question indicates a class that is powerful, rich and lives in luxury, in fact a 'moneyed aristocracy' whose wealth is mostly derived from the land it owns. The novelists in presenting the dhawāt rarely go beyond depicting wealth which enables these big landlords to be an exclusive class, distinguished from the rest by its opulence and behaviour. We hear of thousands of acres owned by one man.[4] We are told of their immense love for money, their magnificent "palaces" and "mansions" in the midst of vast fruit

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1. The Badrāwī ʿĀshūr family and the Shaʿrāwīs. The ʿumda of Buhut in 1869 was of the former family and until the land reform in 1952 the Buhut village formed an important part of the vast estates of the Badrāwī-ʿĀshūr family. Ḥasan Shaʿrāwī was in 1866 ʿumda of Maṭariyya (Minya) in the same area as the extensive land belonging to the Shaʿrāwī family in the twentieth century. For details see Baer, Landownership, pp. 45-60, 137.
2. H. Ayrout, The Egyptian Peasant, p. 19.
3. Ibid., pp. 18-19.
4. Y. Idrīs, al-Ḥarām, p. 32; Y. al-Sibāʿī, Innī Rāḥila, p. 294; Lāshīn, Ḥawwāʾ bilā Ādam, p. 70; T. al-Ḥakīm, ʿAudat al-Rūḥ, II, pp. 12, 18-19.

gardens.[1] And we learn a little of their behaviour towards the tiller of the land they own. But we hear almost nothing of how this ownership came into being among the various groups of landowners. In no instance is the origin and rise of a large land-owning family traced. Apart from Ahlan wa Sahlan and to a limited extent in al-Ard the various dishonest tactics employed to gain or increase a man's land are hardly mentioned.[2]

Accumulation of Land

'Land robbery' through clever administration was one way by which the ruling family in particular came to own very large estates.[3] This practice is vividly illustrated in Ahlan wa Sahlan. The editor of the King's Party newspaper is puzzled about the real motive behind the King's supposed visit to Kafr Suhail, when he learns from its 'umda that he is not all that rich. All the 'umda possesses does not exceed 300 faddans and these are in a poor part of the country. "Then why is the King going to visit him?" the editor mutters to himself. He cannot envisage plausible reasons for a visit which to all appearances seems futile especially as he King is a man "who thinks only of land and estates".[4] Later in the narrative, the author exposes the subtle means by which

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1. Y. al-Sibā'ī, Innī Rāḥila, p. 324; Maḥfūẓ, Qaṣr al-Shawq, pp. 158, 160.
2. Mu'nis Ḥusain, Ahlan wa Sahlan, pp. 25, 118-119, 213; 'A.R. al-Sharqāwī, al-Ard, p. 6.
3. Ayrout, op. cit., pp. 17, 24, Baer, Landownership, pp. 40, 135.
4. Mu'nis, H., op. cit., p. 162.

the King's men pave the way for the King to achieve his end at the expense of the people. The ʿumda, a pitiless rascal himself, but utterly at a loss when confronted with the sophisticated machinations of the Court, is made to believe that the King has the welfare of the country, the rural masses in particular, at heart. His visit, everyone is told, is "to find out the condition of his people".[1] "The King always asks us to look after the peasants,"[2] says Rifqī Pasha, the secretary of the Party, ironically. "He is not interested in anything as much as he is interested in land and agriculture. He considers himself a peasant."[3] In the light of King Fu'ad's zeal in accumulating land,[4] on whom the figure of the King in the novel is based, no truer statement could have been uttered. This image the King wishes to spread about himself in order to carry out his designs unobtrusively convinces the ignorant and unthinking. However, the author makes it clear that others among the people are shrewd enough to see the forthcoming royal visit for its real worth. Sharāra, a Jack-of-all-trades, is not fooled by this sudden show of "patriotism" by the King. He explains to his fellow companion on the train, that the real purpose of such visits is to enable the King "to stop at every town and see with his own eyes the land he is going to steal later."[5] Even among the simple villagers of Kafr Suhail

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1. Ibid., pp. 159-160, 210.
2. Ibid., p. 200.
3. Ibid.
4. Ayrout, op. cit., p. 17.
5. Ḥusain Mu'nis, op. cit., p. 106.

there are those who know better than to believe in the "democracy" of the King and this sudden interest in his subjects. They know that he is after the land, for "never do his eyes fall on a piece of land except to grab it"[1] remarks one peasant to another.

Whereas the novels give the reader no information on the methods adopted by the new rich urban groups or the dhawāt in acquiring their land and wealth, a little more is to be found on the ʿumdas. It is clear that the ʿumdas do not belong to the dhawāt, but their considerable wealth raises them above the ordinary village folk.[2] In the second half of the nineteenth century, the head of a notable family in the village who was appointed by the ruler as headman of the village, shaikh al-balad, came to be known as ʿumda.[3] According to ʿAlī Mubārak, the office of ʿumda enabled its holder to increase his landed property.[4] He exploited his dominating position in village life and forced the peasants to cultivate without payment the 5 per cent of village land allocated to him by Muḥammad ʿAlī in order to meet the expenses of their guest houses.[5] Though Saʿīd expropriated these lands from the headmen in 1858,[6] they found new ways of increasing their

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1. Ibid., p. 449.
2. Mubārak cites a number of ʿumdas with 1,000 faddans. ʿAlī Mubārak, al-Khiṭaṭ al-Tawfīqiyya al-Jadīda (Cairo, Bulāq, 1304-5 A.H.= 1886-89,) vol. VIII, p. 21; IX, p. 14. XI, p.5; XII, p. 137. See also Mackenzie Wallace, Egypt and the Egyptian Question, p. 191.
3. Baer, Landownership, p. 51.
4. Mubārak, op. cit., vol. IX, p. 86.
5. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Jabartī, ʿAjā'ib al-Āthār fī al-Tarājim wa al-Akhbār (Cairo, Bulāq, 1297 A.H.= 1879), vol. 4, p. 311.
6. See Yacoub Artin-Bey, La Propriété foncièr en Égypte (Cairo, 1883), pp. 102-103, 293.

estates. Since they were the local representatives of the Government, in practice they exerted a great measure of control over village land. As they were also responsible to the Government for the quota of men for the corvee and the army it was they who decided who was to be conscripted thus making their power over the peasants and their land almost limitless.[1] If the nineteenth century dhawāt's large estates were created chiefly by means of grants from the ruler, not so the landed property of village notables. This was acquired mainly at the expense of the peasants' holdings.[2]

In Ahlan wa Sahlan the method by which the ʿumda's family acquired land is exposed. Ṣādiq Mandūr Abū al-Shawārib, the ʿumda of Kafr Suhail, is boasting about the "boldness" of his grandfather, the founder of the family's wealth. He recalls how the grandfather used to extort money from the villages. When he arrived at Kafr Suhail, he had collected two bags of gold. He bought 20 faddans. He was a person whom "the government used to fear" and " . . . the peasants trembled in front of him.[3] Whenever he liked a piece of land, he took it without anyone opposing him."[4] "And when he died,' continued the ʿumda, 'he left us money in pots, and land as far as the eye could see." As for his son, the present ʿumda's father, "he inherited all these qualities . . . he used to collect money from

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1. Bayle St. John, Village Life in Egypt (London, 1852), vol. 2, p. 84.
2. See Mackenzie Wallace, op. cit., pp. 222-223, 227.
3. Ḥusain Mu'nis, Ahlan wa Sahlan, p. 119.
4. Ibid.

the peasants, pay the government what he saw fit and keep to himself what he wanted . . .. He had a whip' says the ʿumda, 'which used to extort from the peasants whatever he wished. A thousand mercies be upon him."[1]

The reference to the money collected from the peasant by the ʿumda is supported by historical evidence. Before the new administrative system was introduced by the British during their occupation, the ʿumda was responsible for tax assessments on state land sold to individuals. As for taking land, the ʿumda was given a free hand for sequestration on non-payment of debt, and received part of the profit made on sales of sequestrated land. Often the ʿumdas made loans to the peasants and so increased their own holdings by seizing the land of the peasant for non-payment of debt. ʿUmdas also increased their land by failing to report the deaths of heirless peasants or by taking possession of the land of people who abandoned it in order to escape the burden of taxation; or by cheating poor and helpless people out of their land.[2]

Several factors helped towards the accumulation of land by various groups, foreign and native, at the expense of the peasants in general. The integration of the Egyptian economy into the world market led to a number of far reaching changes which greatly affected the condition of the peasants. The transition to taxes in cash

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1. Ibid.
2. Baer, Landownership, p. 53.

instead of in kind, the replacement of foodstuffs by cashcrops, the establishment of Mixed Courts which introduced mortgages known in Europe and the dishonest tactics adopted by usurers, all led to an increase in the peasants' debt and their dispossession mainly by foreign creditors.[1] Moreover, during the twentieth century State land put up for sale was mainly sold to big landlords or urban rich who wanted to invest money in land, and not to small farmholders as the avowed policy prescribed. It failed because the small farmholder could not compete financially with the rich and had no ready cash for such transactions.[2]

The Social and Political Power of the Rich

The correlation between power and property is presented in the novels whenever a wealthy character is depicted or referred to. The following episode in Ahlan wa Sahlan sheds light on the whole question of power and its relationship with wealth, specifically in terms of the number of acres of land owned. ʿAbd al-Jalīl, a former Azharite, poor and insignificant, who is accompanying the ʿumda of his village on this vital visit to Cairo, comes across poor but energetic and artful Sharāra while on the train from Upper Egypt to the Capital. During a conversation between the two ʿAbd al-Jalīl confides in Sharāra his wish to enter politics. He acknowledges the dangers involved but cannot help seeing politics as a means of

1. See above, pp. 165-167.
2. For a vivid description see Ayrout, The Egyptian Peasant, pp. 20-21; also Baer, Population and Society, p.154.

acquiring riches or a high social status. Political parties and wealth are synonymous in his view.[1] "But these are the whales, the sharks and the big snakes. They get fat on the flesh of the likes of you," remarks Sharāra seriously. He has a better knowledge of the world than ʿAbd al-Jalīl who has been confined to his village. Politics as Sharāra sees it is a trade with a capital. "He who is bankrupt increases his bankruptcy and he who is well-off adds to his riches by entering it." Accordingly, the King in Sharāra's classification is the "big whale". Though the richest, he is fed by all but "is never full".[2] "Land, houses and money he swallows . . . his mouth is wide open and all throw things into it."[3] Next, come the "sharks", those "who call themselves ministers. They eat everything, wood, stone and people."[4] Surrounding them all are the "deputies", every one of them a "snake".[5]

In fact, Sharāra's "big whale", "sharks" and "snakes", dominated the political scene after the First World War. A candidate for the Senate or the Chamber of Deputies had to be one of the wealthy landowning class. One of the qualifications laid down in the 1923 Constitution for membership of the Senate was that the candidate should pay no less than £E150[6] in tax on land he owned,

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1. Ḥusain Mu'nis, Ahlan wa Sahlan, pp. 104-105.
2. Ibid., p. 105.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. See Baer, Landownership, p. 143.

Only large landowners could seek such an appointment. Sharāra also exposes the electoral system. When ʿAbd al-Jalīl declares naively, his intention of standing for Parliament, the Chamber of Deputies, Sharāra exclaims in disbelief: "The Chamber of Deputies? Have you two or three thousand pounds? Have you about £E500 for the party's treasury and four or five times as much for the electors?"[1]

In order to become a member of one of the two governing assemblies, Upper or Lower, a man had to be well off. This point is also stressed by Yūsuf al-Sibāʿī in Ard al-Nifāq. In a scene full of humour and sarcasm we learn how the candidate has slaughtered a whole calf and prepared dinner for the would-be voters. When his turn comes to address those present, he sheds his hypocritical mask and reveals his true self and intentions to the electors. (This outspokenness is brought about because he is under the influence of the moralizing drink which he has swallowed unknowingly.) He confesses that he is very rich and owns land and factories. His sole intention in getting into Parliament is to become one day "His Excellency . . .".[2] In Zuqāq al-Midaqq, Maḥfūẓ draws a similar picture of the preparations for the election of the candidate. Money is lavishly spent on food, drink and entertainment. The whole quarter is transformed into a mawlid.[3]

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1. Ḥ. Mu'nis, op. cit., p. 106.
2. Yūsuf al-Sibāʿī, Ard al-Nifāq, p. 452.
3. Maḥfūẓ, Zuqāq al-Midaqq, pp. 190-193.

Abuse of Power

The rich land owning class represented in the novels wielded great power over the masses whether as landlords or as 'representatives' of the country, in Parliament. The peasant, on the other hand, subjected to continuous bad treatment, emerges as a human being to be reckoned with during election time only. His votes and even the votes of the long dead are added to the list sent by the 'umda to please the forthcoming government.[1] The relatively better treatment lasts only throughout the election campaign and so long as the peasant shows no objection to the favoured party. Once he forms an opinion of his own and refrains from casting his vote for the candidate in the person of the local pasha or one of the rich landowners of the area, he is treated brutally and with the utmost contempt,[2] as is amply illustrated in al-Ard.

The image of the all-powerful landlord reflected in the novels is no exaggeration. As early as 1900, the British Agent had commented that all candidates for the Provincial Councils were members of important landowning families. In 1913 forty-nine members out of sixty-five in the Legislative Assembly were big landowners.[3] No noticeable change occurred during the first half of the twentieth century. Among the 319 members of Parliament

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1. 'A.R. al-Sharqāwī, al-Ard, p. 80; "Bribe or lash', writes Ayrout, 'were the two methods usually used to secure the fellah's vote, according to the means available to the candidate and the party." Ayrout, op. cit., p. 14.
2. al-Sharqāwī, al-Ard, p. 266.
3. Elinor Burns, British Imperialism in Egypt, p. 25.

elected at the beginning of 1950, 115 owned land amounting to more than 100 faddans each, and 45 owning at least 500 faddans of land. Large landowners had strong representation in the government, the high bureaucracy, municipalities, various committees and all political parties.[1] The whole country's political, economic and social life was but an echo of the interests of the big landowning stratum of society. From King to deputy their propositions and their decisions were made for their own benefit. The overwhelming power the rich landlords held in the legislative and executive fields made it virtually impossible for the masses to achieve a better standard of living. Wherever they turned they came up against forceful opposition. Since both houses of Parliament and the government represented the interest of the landowning class, land reform was strongly opposed. The interpenetration of industry and landowning mentioned earlier eliminated the only force that could have challenged the power of the landlords. While industrialists increasingly invested money in landed property, landowners participated in urban enterprises. Together they formed a formidable block that neither worker nor peasant could break. As things stood, people aware of conditions lost hope of Parliament. "To govern in this country leads nowhere except the well-being of the political parties,"[2] remarks an official in Arḍ al-Nifāq. Books were written exposing the parties' selfishness, corruption and utter disregard of the welfare of the country. "The endeavours of the parties

1. Baer, Population and Society, p. 208.
2. Y. al-Sibā'ī, Arḍ al-Nifāq, pp. 147-148.

regarding our internal affairs have been mostly directed towards futile and harmful debates,"[1] writes Mirrit Ghālī in Policy of Tomorrow. Issawi makes a similar remark. He states that the wealthy landowners providing the vast majority of members of Parliament and cabinet ministers have "used their power as selfishly as any ruling class and less intelligently than most."[2]

The prevailing system drove the more ambitious among the enlightened poor to desperation. Their frustration is reflected in Tāhir Lāshīn's novel Ḥawwā' bilā Ādam. His heroine Ḥawwā' commits suicide, apparently for sentimental reasons. On a deeper level, the decision to put an end to her life reflects the utter despair and hopelessness the honest hardworking persons of the lower classes felt when confronted with such formidable obstacles against which all their aspirations were dashed. Only for those who were utterly without scruples and devoid of any principles was there scope for bettering their positions. Since the road to power and consequently freedom, lay through joining the parties, every means was used by the dishonest to realize this end. This was evident in the frenzied quest for a dominant position whether through acquiring money or swindling one's way up to the top. It is a recurrent theme in a number of novels. One of the funniest scenes, with deeper implications, occurs in Ahlan wa Sahlan. A candidate

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1. M. Ghālī, The Policy of Tomorrow, p. 8.
2. C. Issawi, Egypt at Mid-Century, p. 258.

with no scruples whatsoever changes parties according to the highest bidder. All is done in the name of Country, People and King.[1]

The 'party game' went on in full swing until 1952 to the detriment of the whole country. According to Mirrit Ghālī, "a country enclosed in the atmosphere of such ceaseless political disputes can never come to see the general interest of its people . . . ."[2]

In order to break the political power of the great landlords, who had successfully blocked for decades any measure of reform for the masses,[3] the new regime had to break their hold on the land from which they drew their wealth, and which was "the very basis of their rule".[4] Expropriation of the very large holdings removed the wealthy families from their dominating position in the life of the country. However, the redistribution enforced by the Law of Agrarian Reform allowed landowners to retain 300 acres.[5] Moreover, expropriated owners received a reasonably high rate of compensation.[6] Thus, though they no longer enjoy the political power they used to in the old days, they still enjoy considerable

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1. Ḥusain Mu'nis, Ahlan wa Sahlan, pp. 257-258.
2. Mirrit Ghālī, The Policy of Tomorrow, p. 9.
3. See Ayrout, op. cit., p. 16; also D. Warriner, Land Reform, p. 11.
4. Baer, Population and Society, p. 156. Of the 1,800 largest Egyptian landowners nearly all their land beyond the 200 faddans allowance was confiscated. All the property of the Muḥammad ʿAlī family was expropriated without compensation in 1953.
5. D. Warriner, p. 14; according to the law of July 1961 the maximum extent of land a landowner is permitted to hold was lowered to 100 faddans. See Baer, Population and Society, p. 159.
6. D. Warriner, Land Reform, p. 14.

wealth if compared to the generally low standard of living of the masses. Of this class after 1952 little is reflected in the novels considered here.

Attitude of the Rich

The relationship between the possessors of 'izbas, the rich and those who tilled the soil, as portrayed in the novels, is similar to that between the all powerful master and the helpless slave. The attitude of the big landowners is one of arrogance and contempt towards the peasant. To him the only language the peasant understands is that of the whip. This is strongly pointed out in Hawwā' bilā Ādam. We hear how Ramzī the Pasha's son is initiated into the world of the landowner. The first lesson he learns from his father is the "wisdom of brutality" in dealing with the peasant. They are, according to the Pasha, "worse than wolves and more sly than foxes"[1] and "poverty and bad conditions and a disaster worse than this one (a reference to the poor harvest and the high rents of land) are the best remedy to tame their evil souls".[2] The Pasha ends his 'sermon' by calling on his son to be alert to their tricks and not to pity their condition. Ramzī's apparent concern for the peasants is soon shed. He follows faithfully in his father's footsteps once he is put in charge of the 'izba.[3]

The status of the peasant in the eyes of the big estate owners and their families is accurately expressed in the childish and naive

1. Tāhir Lāshīn, Hawwā' bilā Ādam, p. 74.
2. Ibid., p. 70.
3. Ibid., p. 146.

description of Ramzī's young sister. The child is asked by her piano teacher whether their estate is beautiful. "Very beautiful," replies the girl ". . . there are fields . . . a canal, and . . . peasants."[1] The peasant constituted a mere object belonging to the land which belongs to them, the rich. This image of the peasant as part of the soil owned by the landlord is supported by Ayrout's statement that: "the fellah found himself between the soil and the masters of the soil, between the anvil and the hammer . . .. Their hammer blows beat him still closer to the soil."[2]

The indifference, neglect and contemptuous attitude of the landowners towards the peasants is well-illustrated in the behaviour of Muḥsin's mother. Even his father, her husband, does not escape her disdain. Being of Turkish origin she looks down on him and criticises him because of his peasant origin. His wealth, though appreciated, is not enough at times to compensate for his background. "You peasant,' she tells him, 'do you deny that it was I who civilized you and taught you how to live in luxury."[3] Her haughty manner and merciless treatment of the peasants is demonstrated in the "white bread" episode. Discovering at lunch that her usual ferangi (white bread) is replaced by native bread, she insists on a peasant going there and then, despite the sweltering heat, to fetch her kind of bread from a

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1. Ibid., p. 70.
2. H. Ayrout, op. cit., p. 3.
3. T. al-Ḥakim, ʿAudat al-Rūḥ, II, p. 13.

nearby town, a few miles away. She is neither moved nor feels any compunction when the supervisor tries to object on the basis of the heat and the peasant's need for an hour's rest, having toiled in the field since five in the morning. She dismisses him roughly with the inconsiderate remark, "to rest . . . the peasant to rest. Since when such comfort?" When the supervisor observes that the peasant is only human, she orders him to go else "the whip will fall on your head . . . peasant race!"[1] Her insolent attitude towards the 'peasant race' is not unique. Lack of respect for the tiller of the land as a being entitled to a human life is the normal attitude of the landowning class towards him. To them, as Ayrout observingly put it, the peasants are only "things" not worthy of any interest and whom "it is considered good form to ignore."[2] Throughout the novels, though only casually, voices raised in objection to cruel treatment receive the nonchalant comment of the landlord that peasants should not be "pampered".[3]

Disdain for the poor in general and the peasants in particular, was carried to such an extent among the landed upper class that it found expression in their complete rejection of anything Egyptian. As the peasants constituted the majority of the Egyptian population, 'Egyptian' came to be identified with poverty, vulgarity, ignorance and filth. The revulsion the rich felt towards

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1. Ibid., II, p. 23.
2. H. Ayrout, op. cit., p. 19.
3. T. al-Hakim, op. cit., II, p. 23.

the masses decided them to sever any connection they had with the country, though the number of native rich was increasing steadily, whilst foreign-owned estates were on the decline in the later decades of the first half of the twentieth century.[1] This feeling of superiority mixed with disdain is strongly displayed by "Tūtū" the young dandy and his sister in al-Sibā'ī's Innī-Rāḥila. In a conversation with ʿĀida a girl from a well-to-do middle class family, "Tūtū" categorically rejects everything Egyptian. "I hate everything Egyptian, this people is still a primitive people, who need centuries to become civilized. It is the people of the fūl and the taʿmiyya " (two popular dishes).[2] In the same novel one is reminded of the well known attitude of "their Excellencies" and "their Honours" towards Egypt, the country from which they drew their wealth but which could not be tolerated otherwise. "Were it not for the few months we spend abroad each year we should not have felt we were living. We are here in the country of the dead, the country of tombs and mummies",[3] is the unashamed remark made by "Tūtū." The purchase of an estate, the accumulation of land was coveted by all the rich. It was a sign of prestige and increased one's wealth. Apart from that the countryside "means only boredom, dirt and mosquitoes."[4] To reside in the countryside for most landlords was out of the question, almost unthinkable. Some boasted that they rarely visited

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1. G. Baer, Landownership, p. 117.
2. Y. al-Sibā'ī, Innī Rāḥila, p. 151.
3. Ibid., p. 204.
4. Ibid., p. 333.

the country as they found it too "difficult to bear", whilst others saw it as "a filthy exile".[1] Ayrout likened them to the old absentee abbots with their benefices. "The Egyptian landlord went as seldom and stayed as short a time as possible",[2] he stated. A similar statement was made by Baer: ". . . absenteeism among members of the family (the royal family) reached such proportions that some of them spent most of their time abroad". He remarks that landowners other than the royal family lived in similar style.[3]

Because of his absenteeism, the rich landlord displayed complete ignorance concerning the peasant and his life. There was virtually no communication between landowner and land tiller. This ignorance is reflected in the novels in which the landowner figures in one capacity or another and will be dealt with in detail later. The only link between the two was the overseer who ran the estates. He was the controller, the executive on whom everything concerning the land depended from the sowing of seeds to the harvesting. The overseer is usually portrayed as exacting and ruthless with the peasants. The picture is supported by Ayrout's description of an overseer. "He is obsequious to his master,' he writes, 'inexorable with the fellah, it is his business to put all possible pressure on the agricultural machinery,

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1. Ibid., p. 334.
2. H. Ayrout, op. cit., p. 19.
3. Baer, Landownership, pp. 138-139.

that is the fellahin, to increase production." As for the peasant he sees the overseer "like a saw, which cuts going and coming".[1]

Only revulsion and disdain are felt for the masses, but there is no attempt to understand them or relieve them of some of the load pressing heavily down on them. There is no hint of landowners improving conditions so that the country they loathe can become a more tolerable place to stay in.

The repressive intention found in the upper class attitude to the land question, wage policy and other forms of social welfare and the workings of justice is also found in its attitude to education. The rich upper class was not divided from the poor lower classes merely by its affluence and the power it wielded in all spheres, economic, political and social. The gulf was immensely wide in the intellectual sphere as well. The policy of education designed by the governing class created this gap, despite the vast educational programme embarked on since 1923. The question of education will be dealt with in greater detail in a following chapter. However, it may be stressed here that the educational system caused much harm to the masses. The dual system of education[2] adopted by the government facilitated the education of the well-to-do from primary to higher schools, while the mass of the population was restricted to poor quality elementary schools with no prospects of continuing their 'studies'

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1. H. Ayrout, op. cit., p. 17.
2. See below, p. 430.

on finishing the course. Moreover, a large section of the hard-up lower middle class suffered considerably from what Dr. Ḥāfiẓ ʿAfīfī described as "the government's unified system of expenditure". He questions the wisdom of free education for the well-to-do who can easily afford to pay the expenses of their children's education and who always got places first at the expense of the poorer section because of their wealth and status.[1] This, while the government knows all too well, he states, "that nine tenths of what it spends on the children of the rich has been collected from the poor who live a miserable life."[2]

Discrimination and favouritism in this sphere is the subject of a letter written by an intelligent, studious girl from the lower middle class in Hawwā' bilā Ādam, who has been deprived of a scholarship in favour of a rich girl. She relates this unjust treatment to "the conspiracy of those circles who attack one unawares like a creeping snake" and whose "hidden hatred" of the lower classes induce them to choose Saniyya instead of her. Because the latter "is from a class better than ours a class with authority and executive power." Her frustration and disillusionment is expressed at the end of the letter when she writes, "as for us poor, we have to remain at our level. Whenever we try to raise our heads, they push them down; whenever we advance

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1. "Our rich compete with the poor for a free place in the schools," wrote al-Zayyāt in 1939. From an article in Wahy al-Risāla, p. 28, 1939.
2. Ḥāfiẓ ʿAfīfī, ʿAlā Hāmish al-Siyāsa, pp. 80-81.

through our efforts, they hold us back."[1]

The great number of foreign schools,[2] frequented by the very rich aggravated the problem. It produced a social and cultural elite whose ideas and assumptions were completely alien. There could be nothing in common between the utterly westernized wealthy upper class and the superstitious and narrow world of the masses. No aspect of the difference in education was so clear as that of language. The wealthy boys and girls who attended the schools frequently could neither read nor write Arabic and prided themselves on not being able to do so. French or English or both were the languages of the upper circles.[3] In the episode cited above from Innī Rāḥila, "Tūtū" speaks in French all the time though addressed in Arabic by his hostess. He makes no secret of his complete ignorance of Arabic literature and its poets and writers.[4] The same is reflected in al-Qāhira al-Jadīda in the charity party scene. Maḥjūb watching the rich ladies notices that "most of them speak fluent French as if French were the language of the house".[5] He wonders sarcastically how "they communicate with the blind girls of the society." Later when the founder of the establishment delivers her speech in Arabic "not one word is free from grammatical mistakes."[6]

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1. Tāhir Lāshīn, Hawwā' bilā Ādam, pp. 46-47.
2. H. ʿAfīfī, op. cit., p. 91; also Issawi, Egypt in Revolution, p. 100.
3. H. ʿAfīfī, op. cit., p. 91.
4. Y. al-Sibāʿī, Innī Rāḥila, pp. 150-151.
5. Maḥfūẓ, al-Qāhira al-Jadīda, p. 92.
6. Ibid., p. 94.

In Ahlan wa Sahlan we are told of a young lady who talks to the editor of a newspaper "only in French, as if she does not know Arabic."[1] As for the royal family, they all spoke Turkish and many of them never learnt to speak Arabic well. Fārūq was the first ruler of the Muḥammad ʿAlī family at whose court Arabic was spoken.[2] Where the whole conversation was not conducted in the foreign tongue, then Arabic was interspersed with greetings, thanks, exclamations of wonder or boredom and criticisms in English or French. These people are described in Innī Rāḥila by those adhering to the Arabic language as the class of "the twisted tongue."[3] Emphasis is laid, especially by al-Sibāʿī, on the irresponsible attitude of this cultural élite. Because of their wealth and connections and their western education they easily occupied prominent positions. But they have no worthwhile object in life save to spend their time in clubs, attend races, exchange wives with each other and struggle against boredom. They are, according to him, superfluous and serve an ornamental purpose only.[4]

If the social attitude of the poor was largely affected by their religion, the same cannot be said of the rich. The Egyptian rich as the rich anywhere, had no scruples about the means of

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1. Ḥ. Muʿnis, Ahlan wa Sahlan, p. 278.
2. E.F. Tugay, Three Centuries, family chronicles of Turkey and Egypt (London, 1963), pp. 57, 162, 241.
3. Y. al-Sibāʿī, Innī Rāḥila, p. 153.
4. Ibid., pp. 147, 152, 283, 286.

making money. Religion did not act as a deterrent. On the contrary in their case, religion and the men of religion were all one in supporting the 'pre-ordained' legitimacy of their wealth. Since man had to accept his predetermined lot, the wealth of the upper class did not come under attack. "We believe in wealth and poverty, just as we believe in fate and destiny,"[1] wrote al-Zayyāt in 1939. The unshakable belief in fate inculcated by the Qur'ān acted as the most powerful defence of the wealthy exploiter. Throughout the novels it is evident that the authors in general did not think along socio-economic lines when contemplating the disparity in wealth between rich and poor. While believing that the rich are entitled to their wealth they see that it is their duty to be benevolent. Emphasis is on charity especially by al-Sibā'ī. Charitable societies figure in al-Qāhira al-Jadīda, Hawwā' bilā Ādam and al-Sukkariyya. It was fashionable among the ladies of the upper class in particular to belong to or run a charitable society. The general impression one gets from the novels is that the rich ladies are not averse from helping the poor not because of any religious scruples but in order to occupy their time which lies heavily on their hands. It also agrees with their taste for publicity.

The rich upper class though not themselves religious, nevertheless relied indirectly on the men of religion, the

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1. H. al-Zayyāt, Wahy al-Risāla, p. 26, 1939.

shaikhs, to persuade the masses by religious arguments to accept the existing order of things and see that the wishes of those in power were carried out to their satisfaction. The shaikhs on the whole found no difficulty in making the masses comply with the aims of the rich. Because of their religious designation, they could easily persuade or dissuade the ignorant masses to agree with or refrain from any particular wish of the wealthy. Moreover, the poor man believing in fate was resigned to the status allotted to him and regarded the prosperity of the rich and their complacent attitude as natural. Thus, religion as preached was a weighty weapon in making the helplessly ignorant respond to the call of the master of the land. In many a case, it acted like a disciplinary stick in the hands of the well-to-do, helping them to maintain their wealth and authority.

The connivance of the shaiks and the governing body against the rural masses is cleverly illustrated in al-Ard in a number of scenes. In Shaikh al-Shinnāwī, the village Shaikh, the author has drawn a picture of the ignorance of these shaikhs in religious as well as worldly matters. Qur'anic verses, often irrelevant to the situation, are quoted as the one and only solution to any problem afflicting the villagers. The Shaikh's limitations are evident when peasants demand practical answers to their immediate problems. On all such occasions he resorts to curses and calls God's anger to fall on the 'unbelievers'. The confrontations between the Shaikh and the outspoken and

practical ʿAbd al-Hādī, the peasant, form some of the most interesting episodes of the novel. By placing the narrow-minded, shallow authoritarian Shaikh opposite ʿAbd al-Hādī, with his simple common sense, the Shaikh's ignorance and his real function are exposed. This is evident in the 'only five day irrigation' episode. Instead of offering the exasperated peasants a practical solution he goes on ranting about the wisdom of God and the "curse" He is inflicting on the village because of the villagers' "disobedience".[1] They do not perform their religious duties as strictly as they should, in his opinion. ʿAbd al-Hādī questions the validity of this argument. He cannot see the logic in the rich Pasha being rewarded by God because of his alms giving, while their poverty stricken village is damned because of its inability to give alms (to the Shaikh) as the Shaikh explained it. Moreover, if the Pasha gives alms, he can afford it, he "possesses a lot", while they have nothing. And he knows of many a large landowner who neither gives alms nor prays and yet "water flows abundantly in his land and grain fills his store-houses."[2] He tells the Shaikh that God's anger never appears to touch the rich and powerful, though they do what they like and do not adhere to His orders. It is not God, as the Shaikh wishes them to believe, who deprives them of what is their right but the government. It is not God who brings upon them all these

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1. al-Sharqāwī, al-Ard, pp. 88,90.
2. Ibid., pp. 90-91.

disasters. Nor is it God who wishes to punish them for what the Shaikh conveniently calls their immoral behaviour. They suffer simply because the government grants the pashas whatever they want at the expense of the helpless peasants. As for the Shaikh, "he has something to sell to those who have money, power and authority. His only concern is to sell what he possesses and damn the village land."[1]

In another episode of the same novel, the reliance of authority on the loyalty of the shaikhs in carrying out its orders is exposed. The crafty 'umda, anticipating the villagers' resistance to the government's seizure of their land in order to construct a road in compliance with the Pasha's wishes, seeks the aid of the unquestioning Shaikh who proves to be most energetic in coercing the peasants to put their signatures on a blank paper according to the 'umda's request. Any objection to such a procedure or questioning about the real content of the "petition" are silenced by his calling God's wrath down upon them and showing them his own signature at the top. The latter, however, is of no significance as he has no land in the village to lose. By implicitly obeying the order of his superior, he helps towards the destruction of the peasants and the gratification of the Pasha's wish.[2]

In Shaikh al-Shinnāwī, the author represents the unquestioning obedience of the men of religion to those in power. They

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1. Ibid., p. 91.
2. Ibid., pp. 120-121, 145, 188-189.

faithfully follow the injunction "obey those who are in charge amongst you,"[1] which the ruling class is only too ready to exploit and put into practice for its own benefit.

In Ahlan wa Sahlan, there is just a hint of the close relationship between the prominent section of society and the men of religion. Shaikh Dasūqī feels completely at home in the company of Rifqī Pasha. Champagne and the company of beautiful, elegant women do not clash with the teachings of Islam as the Shaikh sees them. Everything is acceptable as long as such companionship furthers a person's interests.[2] This co-operation between the ruling class and the men of religion is also exposed and attacked by a man of religion himself. Khalid M. Khalid, an Azharite, regards the reliance of the wealthy governing class on the men of religion to carry out their plans and further their interests, thereby safeguarding their positions and hindering any social change, as "an impediment to evolution and progress . . . seeking to keep all social, economic and cultural principles at a standstill."[3]

Aspects of Wealth

The novels provide a fairly satisfactory picture of the various manifestations of wealth which the privileged class

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1. Qur'ān, IV, 59.
2. Ḥ. Mu'nis, Ahlan wa Sahlan, pp. 266, 276.
3. Khālid M. Khālid, From Here We Start, p. 41.

enjoyed. One manifestation which occurs frequently is the magnificent dwellings of the rich. They stand out in great contrast to the squalid hovels of the poor. They are spacious villas, so grand in fact that the novelists refer to them in most of their writings as 'mansions' or palaces, "qusūr." They are usually surrounded by beautiful, well-kept gardens. Their children play there during day time, cycle, stroll or sit in the arbour and discuss all sorts of subjects.[1] The entrances to these mansions are wide and paved with marble. Magnificent steps lead to spacious verandahs and these in turn to large halls. There is a constant stress on the vastness and spaciousness of it all.[2]

The opulence of the upper class is further emphasised by the number of villas they own. Besides the one in the capital or Alexandria or in both cities, they have the indespensable country house on their estate which is in no way inferior to what they possess in the cities, despite the fact that their visits to the countryside are rare. These country 'palaces' stand in the midst of rich fruit gardens and vineyards where mangoes, oranges and grapes are plentiful.[3] They appear very startling in contrast with the drab, colourless, shapeless mud huts of the peasants not far away.

Furniture, according to the novels, is no less grand than

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1. See, for instance, Maḥfūẓ, Qasr al-Shawq, p. 158; Bidāya wa Nihāya, p. 180; al-Sibā'ī, Innī Rāḥila, p. 294.
2. See Maḥfūẓ, al-Qāhira al-Jadīda, p. 54; Qasr al-Shawq, pp. 158-160; Bidāya wa Nihāya, p. 180; Lāshīn, Ḥawwā' bilā Ādam, p. 65.
3. Y. al-Sibā'ī, Innī Rāḥila, p. 324.

the buildings. It is of good quality and elegant. Every piece is exquisite. Armchairs are soft and comfortable; tables in the dining rooms, long and beautiful; dishes are of the best china, glasses of crystal, chandeliers, bright and magnificent, mirrors long and superb, paintings lovely and cushions lush and velvety. Then there are the carpets "into which one's feet sink".[1] The ʿumda's breath is taken away by the splendour displayed in Rifqī Pasha's house.[2] If the ʿumda a countryman with a primitive taste, is dazzled by the luxury surrounding him in the Pasha's house, so also is Muḥsin a younger man with a more developed taste in ʿAudat al-Rūḥ. He cannot help feeling impressed and secretly proud of the spacious house his parents own in the country and the "superb furniture" and the whole "beautiful collection" they have there.[3]

A point which it is not irrelevant to mention here is the curious absence of any description of the most luxurious residences whether in Cairo, Alexandria or the country, namely those of the King and the royal family. There is no description of the splendour of the royal palaces or the extravagance of their inhabitants. It could be explained as primarily the consequence of the novelists' limited knowledge of the way of living of the wealthiest stratum and the highest of high society. Having

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1. M. Mu'nis, Ahlan wa Sahlan, p. 205.
2. Ibid., p. 282.
3. T. al-Ḥakīm, ʿAudat al-Rūḥ, Part II, p. 15.

generally a middle class or lower middle class background, their contact with the ruling family or with the display of their wealth cannot have been close. However, it is surprising that the pomp and opulence of the Court, never out of the daily news, found no echo in the novels. In Ard al-Nifāq where several ills besetting the Country are exposed, no mention is made of the ostentatious display of wealth and grandeur of the royal family. In the world of the novels as a whole the most highly privileged of the rich are hardly touched upon. It is a serious omission. Had the lavish expenditure of the Court been depicted the abject poverty and squalor of the masses would have been brought home with much greater force.

What figures frequently in the novels and is associated with status and wealth are certain areas and streets in Cairo and Alexandria in which the rich live. The mention of such parts of Cairo as 'Garden City', al-Zamālik, al-Maʿādī, Miṣr al-Jadīda (Heliopolis), is enough to conjure up in the mind of the reader pictures of luxury and comfort. These areas are exclusive to the rich class (Even after 1952, though no longer exclusive to the rich, they are still inhabited by the more prosperous class). They are as good as barred to the public. "Quarter of the Privileged"[1] is how Ḥasanian, coming from a popular area refers to al-Zamālik. "A place with grand villas and magnificent gardens" is how Garden City is seen by the

1. Maḥfūẓ, Bidāya wa Nihāya, p. 26.

'umda.[1] Beautiful, tree-lined avenues with lovely mansions along both sides like those of Rashād Pasha, Fusṭāṭ and Ṭāhir streets, denote the obvious social status of their residents. Those who can afford living there are undoubtedly very rich. To the occasional visitor from the poor lower middle class they appear as "impregnable to misery"[2] and the air is described as clear and wholesome." They have nothing in common with the damp, derelict, overcrowded dwellings in the squalid quarters of the 'old' Cairo mentioned above.[3]

A recognized symbol of wealth and prestige is the car. Pashas, their wives and children, girls and boys alike do not go anywhere without a car.[4] Its significance as a status symbol made it a most coveted dream of the social climber. To possess a car brings him closer to the envied moneyed group and opens promising new vistas for him. In the Cairo world of Maḥfūẓ's novels, the younger men from the lower middle class, in their dreams of emulating the rich make the car a prerequisite for an upper class satus. This obsession with owning cars is supported by Issawi who considers the car the "best single index" regarding the increasing consumption of the wealthy.[5]

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1. Ḥ. Mu'nis, Ahlan wa Sahlan, p. 205.
2. Maḥfūẓ, al-Qāhira al-Jadīda, p. 54.
3. See above, pp.210-211.
4. T. Lāshīn, Hawwā' bilā Ādam, p. 51; Maḥfūẓ, al-Qāhira al-Jadīda, pp. 71, 114.
5. Issawi states that the number of cars registered rose from 3,500 in 1920 to 28,000 in 1938 and 102,000 in 1951. C. Issawi, Egypt at Mid-Century, p. 86.

Clothes are another sign of status. The money spent on the various items of a rich person's wardrobe is not explicitly mentioned, but the elegance and style are stressed. The luxury of expensive clothes is not a new prerogative of the wealthy class. But whenever there exists in a place too wide a gap between the 'haves' and the 'have nots', clothes take on a special significance. It is interesting to note the impact clothes have on the new rich. They are very conscious of their appearance and that of others.[1] Different are those who have enjoyed an easy living for sometime. They dress immaculately, but do it naturally.[2] All are one in wearing clothes that have a maximum effect on others.

One of the main aspects of opulence never ommitted in the novels is food. Delicious and very varied dishes, Egyptian and foreign alike, figure largely when parties are given by the rich. Maḥfūẓ's lower middle class characters identify status with "filling one's stomach with meat and fruit", the two major items normally inaccessible to the poor. Meat, fruit, drinks are synonymous with wealth.[3] The effect food has on the general health and appearance of characters is stressed. The rich are depicted as smooth-faced, good-looking, radiant, and "full". They stand out in glaring contrast with the 'haggard' and usually 'ugly' faces of the hungry poor.[4] In the case of the elderly men

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1. Maḥfūẓ, al-Qāhira al-Jadīda, pp. 57, 92, 108.
2. H. Mu'nis, Ahlan wa Sahlan, pp. 206, 282.
3. Maḥfūẓ, al-Qāhira al-Jadīda, pp. 66, 191; Bidāya wa Nihāya, p.171.
4. Maḥfūẓ, al-Qahira al-Jadida, pp. 49, 66, 185.

'pot bellies' in particular signify obesity and wealth.

Titles played an important part in real life before 1952 and do no less in the novels. A curious significance is attached to titles, whether in real life or in fiction a reflection somehow of a society that judges its members on sham appearances especially as titles were gained not for merit but were considered by the moneyed class as a profitable transaction. The King makes good money out of 'granting' titles such as 'pasha', and 'bey' to the greedy aspiring rich. They in return for their money derive self-satisfaction and a new status to be looked up to. Pasha is the most coveted title. Rich notables from the country, large landowners, and big merchants, all go to great lengths to have such an 'honour' conferred upon them. Several receive the title pasha after generous donations to one or another of the many so-called 'welfare societies' and social projects. Others, like the well-off middle class merchant in Zuqāq al-Midaqq, aspiring to loftier social heights, is aiming at "buying" the title of "bey"[1], by offering the required sum of money to the 'Court'. A few like the ʿumda in Ahlan wa Sahlan, though a miser by nature where his villagers are concerned, has not a second's hesitation, nor does he regret the donation of £E200 to the "People's Party", i.e. the King's Party. He has no qualms in parting with the money, in the hope of having the title of pasha conferred upon him some time later and probably a

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1. N. Maḥfūẓ, Zuqaq al-Midaqq, p. 89.

seat in Parliament.[1]

The assignment of titles in Egypt is almost an obsession with the public at large. The title of 'professor' (ustādh) has degenerated into a joke. Everyone who has gone through the most elementary stages of education is addressed as ustādh. This needless to say, deprives the original title of its scholarly significance. No prominent character was addressed without the word sa'ādat (Your Honour) or fakhāmat (Your Excellency) preceding the title, particularly before 1952. (Titles were abolished by the new régime.) This obsession indicates a psychological defect, which has its roots in the history of a people subjected for centuries to foreign rule, and who have developed across the centuries a cringing respect for anyone in power. With the decline of the Turkish element in the controlling positions, especially after the British occupation in 1882 and the gradual emergence of the native Egyptian in the cities and towns, titles became the most coveted legacy inherited from the Turks for anyone aspiring after eminence. Adopting a title was seen as an approach to equality with abnā' al-Turk, the dhawāt who for centuries had been the ruling élite. Moreover, it compensated for an inherent feeling of failure to achieve anything really effective.

State ceremonies, where money was lavishly spent to create a false atmosphere of pomp and grandeur are barely touched upon

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1. H. Mu'nis, Ahlan wa Sahlan, p. 214.

in the novels, though not infrequent in the news. The nearest the reader gets to a ceremony is in Ahlan wa Sahlan. The 'umda in the belief that the King with all his majesty is going to visit his village on a tour through Upper Egypt, exerts himself to create a suitable atmosphere, unsophisticated though he is to fit so grand an occasion. Flags are bought, raised or hung; new police and railway stations are built. His own house is redecorated and many rooms refurnished; countless sheep and poultry are slaughtered. The whole place looks all of a sudden with all the demolition and construction that is going on as if it were "struck by an earthquake".[1] Of the really grand celebrations and state ceremonies which cost the treasury a great deal and served no purpose, no mention is made.

The Writers' Attitude

Having exhibited the moneyed class chiefly in its capacity as big landowners seen through the eyes of the novelists, it is appropriate to examine the novelists' reaction to the world of this class and their attitude to questions arising from the political and social status this class enjoyed because of its wealth.

It is surprising how little the novelists disclose of the true cause of the Country's shameless luxury on the one hand

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1. H. Mu'nis, Ahlan wa Sahlan, p. 393.

and its glaring poverty on the other. Rich households are depicted as existing in close proximity to the hovels of the poor, but the contrast and its deeper implications seem to be lost on the majority of the novelists. In some instances, consequences of the unequal distribution of wealth are reflected but not analysed or criticized. Social differentiation appears to be accepted generally as the natural order of things and not as an interplay of cause and effect. As mentioned above, the all-important question of the accumulation of land resulting in the existence of a small minority of very rich and a majority of paupers is not treated. There is a most curious gap concerning the way in which the landowners mentioned - the King and the ʿumda in Ahlan wa Sahlan are exceptions - gained their land and rose to their powerful positions. For whereas the rich are depicted surrounded by the evidence of their wealth and the symbols of their power, the reader is left in ignorance of how they came by them. Moreover, the great 'aristocracy' hardly enters the novels. (Rudda Qalbī is an exception.) The term 'aristocratic' is often used by the authors for the wealthy but lesser men and women and the hangers-on upon the fringe of smart society. The complete irresponsibility of this class with hardly any consciousness that the community exists is exposed and attacked by al-Sibāʿī. The rest of the novelists reflect this nonchalant attitude unconsciously as an inherent part of the general picture of this group they present.

Another serious limitation of the novelists is their complete neglect of how a section of the rich upper class made its money during this century from industry, commerce and finance. Nor is there a hint of the interpretation of industry and land, and the subsequent identification of interests between landowner and industrialist. Similarly, the relationship between factory-owners and workers which was far from satisfactory is not treated by the authors.

The socio-political structure which enabled the landowners to reign supreme before 1952, and thereby hindered any improvement in the condition of the masses, does not form a target of attack by the novelists. Characters portrayed by Maḥfūẓ though resentful of the immense riches and power enjoyed by the upper class do not envisage attacking it. They are rather driven by a desire to emulate the rich. Their pre-occupation with improving their lot narrows their world into the pursuit of status symbols (marriage to a rich girl, owning a car, settling down in a fine villa, eating rich good food and enjoying life). They no longer see or care about the actual wrong which deprived them of a decent living in the first place. Even those among them who we are told are radical, or of 'leftist' inclination (ʿAlī Ṭāhā in al-Qāhira al-Jadīda, Aḥmad Shawkat in al-Sukkarriyya) have no clear insight into the underlying causes of the problem. Those who do see and understand the situation (Aḥmad Rāshid in Khān al-Khalīlī and Sawsan in al-Sukkarriyya) are deprived of action. Their outlook is not translated into practical terms by the author.

Both al-Ḥakīm and al-Sibā'ī offer the reader enough evidence of the landowners' haughtiness and contemptuous attitude and exploitation of the poor. But what they say against this class is seldom very damaging. Al-Sibā'ī is not friendly towards the powerful landowning group. He castigates their lack of patriotism and their irresponsibility, but fails to confront them with a character strong enough and sincere enough in his beliefs to challenge their stand. 'Ā ida, the middle class girl in Innī Rāḥila, remains throughout sickeningly passive. She sees right through the emptiness, the snobbishness, and the callous attitude of the rich upper class and yet her revulsion never develops into outspoken objection or disparagement of that class. She is deprived from the start of a most valuable asset in these circumstances, that of spirit, and a will to fight. When her whole future is at stake she gives in to her money-loving, position-seeking father, without a struggle and agrees to marry the one man she loathes, despite the fact that she has strong grounds for defying her father's orders. She is deeply in love with her cousin who wants to marry her.

Muḥsin in al-Ḥakīm's 'Audat al-Rūḥ takes a similar cowardly stand vis-a-vis his parents. He fails because of his spinelessness to convince the reader of the sincerity of his anger against his parents. It is evident that his soul does not rebel against their abuse of power. He is moved by a feeling of pity

for the peasants, the kind of feeling a superior being, who is better off, can afford showing to the downtrodden, without committing himself to anything. However, the luxury that surrounds him has a stronger hold on him than the pity he experiences occasionally. The thought of Saniyya, the girl he loves, seeing the large villa and the elegant furniture, fills him with pride. The entrance of his mother and father in their splendid clothes appears to sweep away all his former resentment against them and he experiences a sense of satisfaction at belonging to them.

Muḥsin's whole approach to the landlord-peasant question exposes his complete ignorance of the peasants' fundamental needs as human beings and offers a most curious explanation of their ways of life and work.[1] His lack of understanding of the wider and the deeper implications of the question and the way he confines his reaction to his parents' ill-treatment of the peasants to ". . . it is a pity", accompanied by a "reproachful look" is the common behaviour of the prosperous middle class and their attitude to such conditions. They act usually as onlookers rarely as participants. When they realize something is wrong they are frightened to put up a struggle and become involved. They criticize and condemn in thought and word but rarely in deeds. Ḥāmid the landowner's son, in Zainab acts no differently. He sees only the beauty of the countryside and allows himself

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1. al-Ḥakīm, ʿAudat al-Ruḥ, II, pp. 30-38.

a few liberties with peasant girls he fancies, a convenient opportunity in a sexually highly suppressed society, where prosperous town girls are kept in strict seclusion and the mixing of the sexes is taboo.

A welcome change of stand is effected by al-Sharqāwī in al-Ard. There is a break from the general conception of lethargy associated with the rural masses when confronted with exploitation by the rich. Helpless and ignorant through ages of submission, and naive in their handling of a situation, nevertheless his peasants show an awakening of the spirit, an awareness of their plight and the connivance of those in power to deprive them of their "right to live". They decide to speak up for themselves and take matters concerning them into their own hands. Their endeavours to get their rights back reflect the new attitude.

Since the land question has not been an issue in the novels, since there is no indication that the novelist considered the distribution of land the basic cause of the wide gap between rich and poor, it is safe to assume that their attitude towards wealth and poverty is far from radical. With the exception of Aḥmad Rāshid (Khān al-Khalīlī) and Sawsan (al-Sukkariyya) who envisage in "socialism" an effective remedy for the existing disparity between "a nation of beggars and a handful of millionaires,"[1] no explicit, constructive suggestion concerning this problem is made. The cure offered by al-Sibā'ī, who is the

1. Maḥfūẓ, Khān Khalīlī, p. 86.

most outspoken in condemning the government, rulers and all the paraphernalia of elections, political parties and parliament, is simply a change of heart rather than a change of structure. He dreams of such a change coming into effect because the people simply take a 'magic drink' called "morals". Maḥfūẓ's non-committal stand leaves the question unsolved. His characters oscillate between the Muslim Brothers' conservative attitude, whose remedy for all ills of society is religion ('Islam is the balm for all our suffering",[1] says Ma'mūn Raḍwān) and the 'leftist' attitude that regards "science and socialism" as the cure for social evils. However, the pervading atmosphere as already noted, is one of passivity, of non-involvement. Whether conservative or so-called radical, his characters are too occupied with their petty daily needs ever to be convincingly interested in improving the lot of the masses by actively questioning the right of the rich minority to a monopoly of wealth and power.

Throughout the novels the reader detects an inherent desire of the novelists to see improvements in conditions happening as though through magic.[2] This childlike notion is evident in the authors' approach to the change of régime in 1952. With the declaration of the new government and a new era, it was assumed that social ills which existed in the old days had been

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1. Maḥfūẓ, al-Qāhira al-Jadīda, p. 45.
2. See Ṭāhā Ḥusain, Naqd wa Iṣlāḥ (Cairo, n.d.), p. 139.

swept away as if by a magic wand.[1]

To sum up, in the vagueness of the authors' stand one can see their utter lack of any political theory. Their lack of insight into the complexities of the existing order and their failure to grasp the deeper implications of the problem of distribution of wealth, deprived the novels of much useful material which would have proved invaluable to the reader and served to reveal the gravity of the situation, fundamentally caused by the unequal distribution of land.

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1. al-Masā' al-Usbū'ī, 21 October,1962 (Cairo).

CHAPTER III

CORRUPTION

Introduction

"In Egypt", writes Berger, 'corruption means primarily the acceptance of small bribes by civil servants in return for some administrative favour, or improper appointment to and promotion in the government service itself."[1] These are also the usual charges made by Egyptians when they speak of corruption in government. It is to these matters that newspapers refer when reporting changes in various ministries. After 1952, the new régime, when speaking of abuses in the civil service or of political abuses in the past, pointed to the same practices. In a speech on the second anniversary of the coup d'état Jamāl ʿAbd al-Nāṣir stated that his regime had "inherited" among other things a "corrupt government", in which "graft, favouritism, party conflict, personal interests and the abuse of influence by government officials were rife."[2] Ample evidence of corruption and abuses of power is to be found in the reports of the Egyptian Civil Service Commission and in the records of the Revolutionary Court.[3]

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1. Morroe Berger, Bureaucracy and Society in Modern Egypt (Princetown University Press, 1957) Social Science No. 1, p. 123.
2. Quoted by Ḥassān Khadr and Amīn Ḥassūna in Egypt's Republic in its first year, Department of Public Relations of the Egyptian Armed Forces, Cairo, 1954, p. 69.
3. See Maḥkamat al-Thawra, Cairo, 1954, vol. 2.

However, such ills are not just the result of an inefficient and corrupt pre-1952 régime as so many of the reports and speeches seem to infer. The roots of the problem go deep into the past. Their existence is but the culmination of a long history of foreign rule, of exploitation, poverty, ignorance and social aspirations.

Two most important historical influences upon the Egyptian administration of today have been the Ottoman administration from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century and the British occupation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Under the Ottomans, Egypt was ruled by representatives of a central administration whose "ruling idea" according to Gibb and Bowen was "distrust - fear of treachery or of unregulated ambition on the part of the officers of the Empire . . .."[1] Extreme centralization and suspicion led to a continuous change of provincial officials. Consequently, the latter came to regard their positions as an opportunity for them to accumulate the biggest gains in the shortest possible time. Moreover, this encouraged a combination of subservience to one's chief and tyranny over one's subordinates throughout the whole administrative system, an ill which is still much in evidence in present-day Egypt and which is amply illustrated in the novels.

When the English occupied Egypt in 1882, they were shocked

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1. H.A.R. Gibb and Harold Bowen, Islamic Society and the West (London, 1950), vol. I, part I, p. 201.

by the degree of official venality they found. Lord Cromer held the view that the "most important duty of the British representative in Egypt was, by example and precept, to set up a high standard of morality, both in his public and private life, and thus to endeavour to raise the standard of those around him."[1] However, by example alone, little could be achieved with such a hallowed tradition. To bring about effective changes would have required genuine reform in a variety of fields, the first of which would have had to be education, the economy and representative institutions. Needless to say, such reforms would have been incompatible with British interests. As foreign rulers, they were mindful of their role as an occupying power and reacted to conditions in Egypt according to their loyalties. In the details of performance of duty the British example discouraged corruption to a certain degree. Reports by Cromer indicate that matters improved in the high courts and in the higher ranks of the government. But only limited progress was made in the lower courts, whilst almost no impression was made on the venal habits of the minor officials in the administrative services.[2] The latter observation is significant. It is a further indication that it was a question of bad economic conditions and lack of proper education rather than following "a set example".

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1. Lord Cromer, Modern Egypt (London, 1908), vol. 2, p. 322.
2. Sir E. Baring to Earl Granville, from Cairo, 10 February 1885, in Great Britain, Egypt No. 15 (1885). Reports on State of Egypt, and the Progress of Administrative Reforms (Cd. 4421), pp. 2-3. Quoted by Berger, op. cit., p. 25.

British influence did not penetrate Egyptian society deeply or widely. They "ruled from the top".[1] British control in 1891 was exercised by 39 officials, who in the words of Cromer formed the "backbone of the Egyptian Civil Administration".[2] The Egyptian people on the whole, having almost no experience of Western administration, did not expect a different kind of rule from the one they had endured for centuries. Very little was done for self-government. Cromer urged caution in the attempt to develop "free institutions". He pointed out that the primary duty of the British was to establish a system which "will enable the mass of the population to be good according to the code of Christian morality".[3] The guidance was to be given by Britons in the various government departments. In his belief that Egyptians were incapable of governing themselves, he kept on adding British staff to the British advisers and thereby tightened British control.[4] "Throughout his long tenure of office," wrote

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1. British influence did not penetrate Egyptian society so deeply and widely as it did the Indian society. For analyses of the British failure "to develop autonomy" in Egypt, see M. Berger, op. cit., pp. 26-28.
2. Great Britain, Egypt, No. 3 (1891), Report on the Administration and Condition of Egypt and the Progress of Reforms (Cd. 6321), p. 28. Many more than that number were in the employment of the Egyptian government and they were accompanied by hundreds of other non-Egyptians as well. M. Berger, op. cit., p. 30.
3. Lord Cromer, "The Government of the Subject Races" (January) 1908, in Political and Literary Essays 1908-1913, London 1913, p. 28.
4. By 1898 the number of Englishmen was 455 compared with only 229 in 1886. The departments in which they were predominant were the essential ones, the ones in need of reform and those related to the foreigners. See Berger, op.cit., p. 26; also P.G. Elgood, Egypt and the Army (London, 1924), pp. 9-10.

Wilcocks, "Lord Cromer had sedulously depressed and kept down every independent Egyptian, and had filled all the high posts with cyphers, with the result that the natural leaders of the people had no opportunity of leading the people."[1] In 1920 the Milner mission found less than a quarter of the higher posts were occupied by Egyptians. They had declined from 28 to 23 per cent from 1905 to 1920, while the proportion of the British had increased from 42 to 59 per cent.[2]

With the declaration of Egypt's independence in 1922, the British left the matter of the "creation of a Parliament with a right to control the policy and administration of a constitutionally responsible Government . . .,"[3] to the Sultan (later King) and Egyptian people. This meant the steady "Egyptianization" of the civil service. By 1929 the number of Europeans in the Egyptian civil service had dwindled considerably.[4]

More and more did the service become an object of domestic politics, and a pliable tool in the hands of the political party in power and the palace. Government posts became "a recognized spoil of political victory."[5] By 1949 efforts at reform culminated

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1. William Wilcocks, Sixty Years in the East (London, 1935), p. 269. The historian-diplomat Sir George Young, confirms these judgements. G. Young, Egypt (London, 1927), pp. 166-167.
2. Great Britian, Egypt, No. 1 (1921), Report of the Special Mission to Egypt (Cd. 1131), pp. 9-10. Quoted by Berger, op. cit., p. 29.
3. Arnold J. Toynbee, Survey of the International Affairs 1925, vol. 1, The Islamic World Since the Peace Settlement, Royal Institute of International Affairs, London 1927, pp. 194-195.
4. Lord Lloyd, Egypt since Cromer, 2 vols.(London1934) vol.2, pp. 105, 198.
5. M. Berger, op. cit., p. 33.

in a draft law reorganising the civil service. In 1952 the new régime, in an attempt to stamp out corruption, set up a Civil Service Commission to report on the state of government employment and the needs of the public service. New regulations were introduced by which the civil service was to be governed.[1] However, the highly authoritarian system of government and its ever expanding role (the nationalizations and the efforts to industrialize) increased the power of the government officials over the economy, thereby increasing their opportunities for corruption, and making their functions even less understandable and controllable by the general public.[2]

Administrative Corruption

Illustrations of political, administrative and social corruption are found in almost all the novels in this study. Most of them depict the various aspects of corruption in pre-1952 Egypt. Iḥsān ʿAbd al-Quddūs in Lā Tutfiʾ al-Shams and

1. Appointments to most posts are to be made according to the applicant's scores in written and oral examinations. Promotion is by merit or seniority and the proportion of each is fixed for the various grades. Civil servants are to be paid the salary fixed for the posts they occupy even if they may be qualified for higher posts. The Commission met with considerable resistance. The policies it aims to carry out imply a different set of values from those still surviving in the Civil Service. Dīwān al-Muwaẓẓafīn, al-Taqrīr al-Sanawī, 1952, (Cairo, 1953), pp. 1-2, 31-34; in Berger, op. cit., p.34.
2. P. Mansfield, Nasser's Egypt (London,1965), p. 167.

Yūsuf Idrīs in al-ʿAib treat the theme against the background of society under the new regime.

To begin with the corruption in the administration we find in most of Najīb Maḥfūẓ's novels a stress on the difficulty a school-leaver or university graduate finds in obtaining a government post. Appointments were not made according to the results of an examination.[1] And the regular procedure, that of applying for a job counted for little, if the applicant had no influential connections. In al-Qāhira al-Jadīda, we get a clear picture of what facilitates the acquiring of a job. Maḥjūb on asking the "personnel manager" about the possibility of a job in the university library is told frankly to "forget your qualifications" (he is a university graduate) and not to "pay the price of an application form" because "the whole question does not exceed one word." He was asked if he had a mediator. "Are you the relative of an important official? Can you ask for the hand of a statesman's daughter? If you answer is yes, you have my congratulations in advance. If no, turn your face somewhere else."[2] The lesson is not lost on Maḥjūb who is in desperate need of a job. He seeks the help of a former acquaintance, a university student who has already achieved the 5th grade and thus has considerable influence. He tells him that he has graduated but that "a certificate without a mediator is

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1. See above, p. 292, note 1.
2. Maḥfūẓ, al-Qāhira al-Jadīda, p. 81.

cheaper than paper used for wrapping up meat."[1] What follows is an enlightening exposition of the means by which a job could be attained and the self-interest of the mediators involved. Sālim al-Ikhshīdī does not reject Maḥjūb's request straight away, but "plays it cool" to impress the young man in need. After a while, he informs him that were he to follow his advice he (Sālim) would find people who would be capable of helping him (Maḥjūb). Moreover, he hopes that Maḥjūb is "a practical man", who "understands the world", and knows that every "gain" has its "price".[2] Then he mentions the name of a well-known businessman whose "word is influential at present and whose special sphere is the "Ministry of Interior". His condition for appointing someone is taking "half of the applicant's salary for two years with a guarantee."[3] Maḥjūb, frightened by such a stipulation, wonders whether there is no one else who offers "easier terms". The official surprises him by mentioning the name of a famous singer. "The area of her influence is the Railways Department, the Ministry of Defence and other big departments."[4] The price she demands varies with the grade the applicant wishes to have. For the 8th grade she demands thirty pounds, the 7th grade, forty pounds, the 6th grade, a hundred pounds, and payment must be "on the spot".[5] Finally, the penniless, but ambitious Maḥjūb,

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1. Ibid., p. 83.
2. Ibid., p. 84.
3. Ibid., p. 85.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.

accepts a much coveted post, that of secretary to the head of a department. The price he pays for this appointment is an odd one. He has to marry a young girl who was seduced by his new boss and agree to the continuation of the liaison between them, because the 'head', a married man, wishes to avoid scandal.[1]

Even when the conditions for securing a government post were not as extortionate as those mentioned, it was recognised that an aspirant to a government job had to get the support of an influential person. In Bidāya wa Nihāya, the widow of a petty official and a mother of four, suggests that her son, who has obtained his secondary school certificate, should go and see a respectable friend of his dead father for "he will be able to appoint you, just like that." When the "important" friend is consulted, he points out the difficulty of finding a job in these days, but "I shall use my best efforts, I do not think that I shall be able to find you a place in the Ministry of Interior, but I am a friend of the Undersecretary at the Department of Education and the Undersecretary at the Ministry of War. Get ready your application form and I'll write you a strong recommendation."[2] But even when an appointment is facilitated by the help of an influential friend, it may take months before the applicant obtains the post. Husain, the young man, found

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1. Ibid., pp. 106, 110.
2. Mahfūz, Bidāya wa Nihāya, p. 182.

out that a "post is not an easy thing to get". Three months have passed, in which he has frequented both the "friend's" house and the Ministries of Education and of War. Finally the 'Bey' informs him that he is appointed to the post of clerk in the Secondary School not in Cairo, where he lives, but in Ṭanṭā.[1]

This last incident illustrates one of the weaknesses of this policy regarding appointments, the fluidity of function. An official was assumed to be able to perform a variety of functions in any one of many departments. The absence of any definition of the functions attached to posts made it easy for those in power to interfere in the affairs of the employee. It also meant that appointments were not made with regard to the requirements of the posts being filled. The above mentioned Civil Service Commission in its report on 'Budgetary Proposals' pointed out that in many departments "the number of those not qualified for their tasks has reached 40 or 45 per cent".[2]

It was equally hard for an official to gain promotion if he had no influential connections. Experience and know-how accounted for little, though higher education made promotion easier. In Khān al-Khalīlī we see into the mind of a petty official who feels deeply that he has been victimized. As a youth, Aḥmad ʿĀkif has to give up his studies in order to support his parents and two younger brothers. Having only a secondary

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1. Maḥfūẓ, Bidāya wa Nihāya, p. 182.
2. Quoted in M. Berger, op. cit., p. 130.

school certificate he finds himself neglected in the 'archives' of the Ministry of Public Works. After twenty years of regular attendance he has not gone beyond the 8th grade. He is one of the "forgotten civil servants".[1] That this picture is true to life is confirmed by what Khalid M. Khalid wrote about the minor officials, in From Here We Start. He describes the condition of one of these minor officials "who is perhaps a copy of thousands. He has served the government for twenty-five years and is still in service . . . His monthly income is seven Egyptian pounds . . . About a year ago, a rumour was circulated that his equal among the "forgotten" servants would receive a promotion to the ninth grade . . . A whole year has gone by since then, and the poor fellow still awaits his promotion."[2] The same point is stressed by Y. al-Sibāʿī in Arḍ al-Nifāq. The narrator in a "fit of generosity" decides to help a distant relative, who is a "civil servant", but who is not a "favourite" or "relative" or "friend" of some important official. He has no one to "accuse him of intelligence" and "concern for his work" and recommend him for exceptional promotion. The author comments sarcastically that he is an ordinary official "poor and forgotten".[3]

Iḥsān in al-Qāhira al-Jadīda, shows how much a pretty wife

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1. Maḥfūẓ, Khān al-Khalīlī, p. 271.
2. Khalid M. Khalid, From Here We Start, pp. 92-93.
3. al-Sibāʿī, Arḍ al-Nifāq, p. 258.

could do for the advancement of her husband in the service.[1] Maḥjūb is promoted from the 6th grade to the 5th and with the 4th in sight in less than three months from the date of his appointment, an impossible advancement had not "a kiss, a glance, a sigh" with the 'chief' done the trick. He becomes the Minister's "bureau chief",[2] a post normally reserved for senior and more distinguished men of the civil service.

Intrigue and influence naturally played a big part in so lax a system. But the majority of the civil servants could not aspire to rise high, as they either had no influential connections or lacked a high education. With the Egyptianization of the civil service after 1923 and the establishment of higher education, a University degree became the token of achievement which qualified the official for the higher posts hitherto occupied by the British, and helped him towards speedier advancement. This was not, however, a new practice. Under M. ʿAlī, secular education was identified exclusively with entrance into government employment. The British formalized it.[3] By creating

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1. Maḥfūẓ, al-Qāhira al-Jadīda, p. 95.
2. Ibid., p. 179.
3. "When occupying the country, the English made much capital out of alleged unripeness of the Egyptian people for self-government, and in his famous report Lord Dufferin faithfully promised that the development of education will be one of the foremost concerns of the new rulers in order that 'the cry of Egypt for the Egyptian should not be a vain one' but there is a vast distance between promise and performance in all dealings of the English with Egypt, and in no other domain has it been so great as in that of education." Theodore Rothstein, Egypt's Ruin /A Financial and Administration Record/ (London, 1910), p. 315.

an upper and a lower division and stipulating a different level of certificate for each (secondary and primary) they solidified the concept of the certificate as a 'badge of education' and a guarantee of public employment.[1]

The great store laid on a degree is illustrated in Bidāya wa Nihāya and al-Qāhira al-Jadīda. In both, the idea of applying for a government post before gaining a university degree is considered a "sacrifice of one's future".[2] It is an 8th grade with scarcely a hope for promotion. Ḥasanain sees himself remaining a clerk all his life, reaching the 6th grade at best.[3] And Maḥjūb who is in a more critical position as there are only "four months between me and the fruit of fifteen years' hard work" pleads with his invalid father not to drive him to look for work just then, for he would be appointed on a secondary school certificate basis if he were to find a job.[4]

The connection between secular education and official employment in a predominantly agricultural society, where opportunities for employment were scarce, increased the desire of school and university graduates to raise their economic and social

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1. "With an assured prospect of employment in the Administration before them, a very considerable increase must take place in the number of those who apply for the secondary and primary certificates of education." Lord Cromer to the Earl of Rosebery, in Egypt, No. 3 (1893), pp. 25-26, quoted by Berger, op.cit., p. 29.
2. Maḥfūẓ, Bidāya wa Nihāya, p. 179.
3. Ibid., p. 306.
4. Id. al-Qāhira al-Jadīda, p. 39

status by obtaining government posts. But the relative economic security had been achieved at a very high price: "a non-functional education".[1] School and university examinations became the "be-all and end-all of a student's scholastic career".[2] Memory was fostered, not the brain. Genuine learning, independent thinking, critical and analytical observation have all been sacrificed to attaining a certificate. The inefficiency and rigidity of the Service testify to the ignorance, lack of skill and initiative of the body of officials, the outcome of an education geared to the production of government servants.

Just treatment is also denied to officials where 'transfer' from or to Cairo in particular, is in question. Cairo, with its numerous attractions, being the political, economic, and cultural centre of the country, was like a magnet to which all officials turned. The pressure to stay in Cairo is great and officials try hard to avoid a transfer from Cairo to the provinces. Those who are appointed to a post outside Cairo, do all in their power to be transferred back to it as quickly as they possibly can.

In a relevant scene, Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm exposes the injustice inflicted on the official who has no connections to support his demand even when it is a just one. A village legal officer in

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1. Radwan, A.F., Old and New Faces in Egyptian Education, p. 151.
2. M. Berger, op. cit., p. 78.

Yawmiyyāt Nā'ib, bored with his drab existence in the village, remarks to a visiting colleague that he believes his turn has come to be posted to Cairo. The visitor comments cynically "Cairo postings don't come in turns, old man. Have you any influence?" "None", replies the official. "Then you'll live and die in the provinces", comes the shattering pronouncement.[1]

Favours were granted by the higher officials of the civil service, as well as expected by the lower ranks and the public. Expectancy was particularly high where friends and relatives were concerned. Being a traditional society, family sentiment is strong and family loyalty a powerful source of motivation. The extension of special treatment to relatives and friends is a common procedure. But loyalty to family and community exert considerable pressure upon the civil servants, and more often than not conflicts with loyalty to the state. The Western concept of the latter as an agency of the community has not yet developed, for historical reasons mentioned earlier, mainly foreign rule. The evolution of civil service systems in the West has shown that transfer of loyalty "from personal ties with groups outside the government to the obligation to serve the entire nation through serving the state is a long process and an uneven one."[2] Thus the impersonal attitude of the official, an important characteristic of modern Western public bureaucracy is utterly

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1. T. al-Ḥakīm, Yawmiyyāt Nā'ib, p. 166.
2. M. Berger, op. cit., p. 145.

lacking. In Egypt as in the rest of the Near East, "people are not yet accustomed to looking upon others impersonally in any situation."[1] Personal ties rather than abstract principles commanded loyalty. Favouring relatives was such a strong custom that Maḥjūb in al-Qāhira al-Jadīda sees the government as "one family". Ministers appoint their relatives as deputies. Those in turn select their governors from their relatives. The governors choose heads of departments from relatives and those choose officials from family circles. Even servants, he comments bitterly, "are chosen from amongst those who serve in the big houses".[2]

It was not only the personnel policy within the civil service that depended largely on favouritism and functioned through personal intercession. An ordinary citizen would find it very difficult to secure attention for his legitimate demands without the mediation of a friend or relative. "Mediation is still the means for facilitating procedures", commented an official, "because the government machine doesn't carry out its duties as it should."[3] To ask an influential person to intercede for one is still considered the best way to have an inquiry looked into. The direct approach led nowhere especially if the citizen were poor and helpless. "The relation between the administration and

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1. Ibid., p. 118.
2. N. Maḥfūẓ, al-Qāhira al-Jadīda, p. 46.
3. M. Berger, op. cit., p. 138.

the people has ... become more and more tyrannical in character", wrote Mirrit Ghālī in 1938. "The only means open to the people', he continued 'was either the recourse to personal intervention for avoiding whatever injustice they could avoid, or to some other dishonest means ..."[1]

The necessity for "recourse to personal intervention" to secure the satisfaction of demands is illustrated in Bidāya wa Nihāya, by Maḥfūẓ. The widow and mother of four children is in dire need of her deceased husband's pension. Her first shock comes when she learns in the Ministry of Education that the pension she is entitled to does not exceed five pounds per month, after thirty years of her husband's government service. However her anxiety grows when she is told of the procedures that precede the actual payment. It may take months they tell her. On seeing her plight, officials, a few of whom were her husband's colleagues, react in a kindly way and promise to do the best they can to facilitate matters within their own Ministry. Over the procedures in the Ministry of Finance they regret that they have no power. Desperate, she turns to an influential inspector who knew her husband and begs him to intercede for her. He promises to do so.[2] Another widow in a similar situation is not quite as lucky. Having no one to intercede for her, her request for her late husband's pension is neglected despite the fact that

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1. M. Ghālī, The Policy of Tomorrow, p. 12.
2. Maḥfūẓ, Bidāya wa Nihāya, p. 25.

she has no other income. A year and a half later, an official comes across the application form in one of the files. The reason given for such delay is that the name of the ma'dhūn who conducted the marriage between her and her husband thirty years ago is missing.[1]

Neglect and delay was the usual fate of any inquiry or application made and not accompanied by intercession. But incompetence, carelessness and delay normally characterized the civil service, even where influence was used, as relevant examples mentioned earlier have illustrated. The general indifference to public demands and the officials' laziness, lack of initiative and irresponsible attitude, in addition to applying elaborate regulations which regulated all procedures in minutest detail, led to disgraceful procrastination in public business. Application forms, papers, documents, kept going round and round in all the State Departments. The slow and unnecessary passing of papers from one department to another for further minuting was and still is one of the worst defects of the administrative system.

Al-Sibā'ī in Ard al-Nifāq attacks what Dickens a century before him in England attacked in the chapters on the Circumlocution Office in Little Dorrit. He exposes the scandalous procedure in the Egyptian administration; the division of responsibility between various departments was an effective check upon getting anything done.

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1. Y. al-Sibā'ī, Ard al-Nifāq, p. 140.

The narrator, the mouthpiece of the author, comments indignantly on the piles of files on his desk. "Files full of paper . . . full of nonsensical complicated stuffing", all of which are "suspended public affairs loitering about in the lanes and alleys of the government routine". They pass round and round and "when overcome by exhaustion, they rest in their files." Looking at the piles of files stacked in the corner of the room, all covered in dust and cobwebs, he sees in this neglect and deathly slowness of the government a malignant disease and deep-rooted malady, "a cancer, from which the community has no hope of recovering". He condemns the government machine as "ruined and old, broken and shattered, built on a basis of folly and complications."[1]

The bureaucratic atmosphere with all its emphasis on keeping to the letter of the countless regulations, thereby causing endless delays, confusion and suffering to the public is most effectively reflected in Yawmiyyāt Nā'ib. The whole book is evocative of the Egyptian bureaucratic climate and the great importance attached to mere paper work. The narrator, who is the writer himself in his capacity as public prosecutor, is contemplating all the files brought to him on minor offences and crimes committed. He reflects on the "cheapness" of human life in the eyes of the administration. It is "cheaper than the ink with which the reports on their cases have been written".[2]

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1. Y. al-Sibā'ī, Arḍ al-Nifāq, pp. 140-141.
2. T. al-Ḥakīm, Yawmiyyāt Nā'ib, p. 170.

The murdered man is officially struck off a list by a simple final measure: "the case is closed because the murderer is unknown". A note is written to the police centre that investigation is continuing. The centre in turn answers in the familiar phrase, written automatically by a clerk while "nibbling a carrot", "search and investigation going on . . .". This is the "farewell term" by which the case is virtually closed. The chief concern of those in charge is the "file" not the human being involved, and the speed with which a case is dealt with. "It is no disgrace if we were to close a case," writes al-Ḥakīm in his ridicule of the system, "but to keep the case open is a terrible disgrace." Negligence would be attached to the public prosecutor.[1] He would be "assailed" with correspondence inquiring the reasons why the case had been kept open. For the higher circles are only interested in the disposal of a case, i.e. getting rid of it no matter how, so that they can record in the statistics ". . . that such and such a number of offences have been committed this year in the country . . . and that a certain number have been dealt with . . .". The writer continues sarcastically that the "greater the number of cases dealt with, the greater the indication of the activity of the men of justice and their concern for the prevalence of security and the satisfactory turning of the government wheels."[2]

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1. Ibid.
2. Ibid., p. 171.

The following episode is a further example of the preposterous concern of the administration with trivialities and its slavish adherence to routine regardless of the essence of the issue. It is an exposition of the needless expense and waste of time and energy in adhering to the letter instead of the spirit of the law. It is a cynical revelation of the situation of a public prosecutor who has been awakened in the small hours of the night to investigate a murder case in the village. After going through the formalities he clasps his head in his hands wondering what to do next and whom to interrogate to bring his report up to the minimum of twenty pages. For he has not forgotten what his chief asked one day when he received a ten-page Report. "What is it? A contravention or misdemeanour?" "When I replied that it was a murder case he shouted in astonishment: 'A murder case investigated in ten pages? An assassination . . . a murder in ten pages? All in ten pages?' I replied that with those ten pages we had managed to get the murderer. He paid no attention to what I said and went on weighing the Report in his hand with careful accuracy. 'Who would ever have believed that this Report could be of a murder case?' I replied instantly: 'God willing, next time we shall be more careful about the weight'."[1]

The public had no legal means by which to defend itself against such routine negligence and what often amounted to scandalous abuse of power on the part of the government official. The

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1. Ibid., p. 20.

The considerable personal contact between citizens and government representatives increased the temptation of the official to act arbitrarily taking the advantage of his position. However, his incompetence, slavish adherence to routine and arrogance did not detract from his status which was considerable in the eyes of the public. In a country where the vast majority of the population is illiterate and immature in opinion, even minor officials are placed above the public and consider themselves as such. Their superiority is indicated apart from everything else, by their ability to read and write, a highly esteemed attribute. But the main reason for their status is their connection with the much feared government. Being agents of that "regulating and restricting force",[1] they share its position and can exert power over the ordinary citizen.

It is interesting as well as significant, to note how often an official is referred to as "the government" by the masses. To them, he represents all the power, arbitrariness and authority which that word conjures up in their mind, the result of centuries of tyrannical rule. In al-Ard, there are many indications of the prestige a government employee enjoys. Whenever an official appears in the village, he is identified with the government regardless of his rank. Whether he is one of the higher officials such as the chief of police al-ma'mūr who comes to pay his condolences to the 'umda's family, or a clerk in the Ministry of

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1. M. Berger, op. cit., p. 93.

Irrigation who inspects the canals, or a sergeant who enforces order in the village, all are referred to as "the government". "The government was at the funeral"[1], "the government struck the deputy of the government", referring to the whipping of Shaikh al-balad by the sergeant[2], and the "government is quarrelling" when the technician threatens his assistant for accepting bribery on previous rounds.[3]

The high status the government official enjoyed attracted the large majority of educated youths to the civil service. A secure income and a lack of an adventurous spirit were further inducements. A non-professional person who sought work outside the government offices was considered a reckless adventurer. ʿAlī Ṭāhā in al-Qāhira al-Jadīda is the object of surprise to those around him when they learn that he rejected a "comfortable government post" in order to "struggle in the journalistic field".[4] So rare is such a tendency that ʿAlī is described by his friends as "a daring young idealist".[5] The word "daring" is significant. It is the key to understanding the attitude of a society where conformity to tradition is the accepted standard. Any step, however small, taken outside the normal channel is seen as strange and demanding sacrifices in prestige, security and power, all of which are bound up with a government post in

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1. ʿA.R. Sharqāwī, al-Arḍ, p. 332.
2. Ibid., p. 339.
3. Ibid., p. 66.
4. Maḥfūẓ, al-Qāhira al-Jadīda, p. 167.
5. Ibid.

the minds of the masses. This attraction to and concept of a government post was caused by an "irresistable combination of need, tradition and deliberate planning."[1]

Much of the power the civil servant seems to enjoy is expressed in his manner and behaviour towards the public. He is haughty, contemptuous and rude. No respect or concern for people or their affairs is shown. Maḥjūb reflects such behaviour. He is considered by all as a "frightening, arrogant official", who believes his "rights" have to be respected in full. He enjoys his tyranny to such an extent that he sometimes wishes to spend the whole day in the Ministry issuing orders and reprimanding people.[2]

High officials do not behave any differently. They make the most of their seniority. Outward symbols of position, the large and elegantly furnished offices, the number of messengers are all on display to impress the public.[3] Throughout the novels, whenever a senior official is depicted, the impression the reader gets is of a man imagining himself to be the sole representative of the government.

The tyrannical behaviour of government officials is not exclusively directed towards the general public. The same behaviour is practised within the ranks of the civil service. Writing at the end of the nineteenth century, Lord Milner stated that the

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1. M. Berger, op. cit., p. 70.
2. Maḥfūẓ, al-Qāhira al-Jadīda, p. 184.
3. Ibid., p. 108; Ḥ. Mu'nis, Ahlan wa Sahlan, pp. 205-206.

Civil Service under the Ottomans "used to be ruined by ill usage". "They were ordered about like slaves, . . . yet they durst not for their lives breathe an objection to the commands of their superiors . . .. And as they were almost always penniless, . . . they dreaded dismissal like a sentence of death . . .. The members of each class of the official hierarchy revenged themselves for the maltreatment they received by maltreating, in their turn, the class beneath them. And they all maltreated the common people."[1] Forty years later, Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm almost echoes the same description. In a scene in Yawmiyyāt Nā'ib, the author goes to see the ma'mūr on business. He finds the latter conversing with an ʿumda whose features indicated neither "wealth nor dignity". Throughout, the ma'mūr's voice is loud and threatening. When he asks the ʿumda to leave in a discourteous manner, the author contemplates the repercussions of such a treatment. "The ʿumda went out humiliated, as if he were a servant or criminal. I said to myself: this humiliation which he has experienced at the hands of the administrators will not be lost. He will hand the same treatment to the people in the village he governs. For the cup of humiliation in this country moves from the hand of the chief to the one beneath him, until, in the end, it reaches the belly of the poor people who drink it all in one gulp."[2]

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1. A. (Lord) Milner, England in Egypt, Second ed., (London, 1893), p. 401.
2. T. al-Ḥakīm, Yawmiyyāt Nā'ib, p. 137.

The behaviour of ʿumdas generally towards those under their charge accords with what al-Ḥakīm has said. There are ample examples in al-Arḍ of the arrogance with which the ʿumda treats the ghafīrs (watchmen). He even resorts to the whip if his orders are ridiculed or questioned.[1]

A relevant scene in Ahlan wa Sahlan exemplifies the prerogatives of status and how jealously guarded are the functions pertaining to each office, however minor. ʿAjāībī, the ʿumda's telephone operator bears his master's outbursts and occasional beatings good humouredly. But when he is asked one day by that same master to fetch him a cup of coffee he feels deeply humiliated. He resents the ʿumda's confusing him with ʿAwaḍ. ʿAwaḍ is only a humble servant, whereas he is an "official, a respected telephone operator". He sees the gap in status between himself and ʿAwaḍ as similar to that between himself and the ʿumda.

"... for servants are servants and masters are masters ... and the coffee is ʿAwaḍ's concern". Out he goes into the corridor and pours his scorn on ʿAwaḍ in abusive language, ordering him to hurry and fetch the coffee for the ʿumda who has been "patiently waiting for a long time."[2]

The tyranny of the superior official, and the servility of his subordinates is illustrated in most novels.

In al-Qāhira al-Jadīda, while Maḥjūb is waiting in al-Ikhshīdī's office, he notices how the latter gives himself airs. He raises

1. ʿA. R. Sharqāwī, al-Arḍ, pp. 110-112.
2. H. Muʿnis, Ahlan wa Sahlan, p. 18.

his voice and speaks in a tone indicating "command and power". He asserts, criticizes and scolds. The voices of junior officials "groaning with explanation, interpretation and apology". Maḥjūb hears everyone addressing al-Ikhshīdī with great deference as "Your Honour". He in turn answers them "slowly, proudly, and arrogantly".[1]

Similar behaviour is depicted in Ahlan wa Sahlan. The ʿumda who sees himself as the absolute master of the village "shrivels up" at the mere mention of the maʾmūr, when called by the latter on the telephone. When he learns from the maʾmūr that the message comes from the governor of the province he "trembles from the top of his turban to the tip of his sandals."[2]

A number of similar episodes throughout al-Ard and Ahlan wa Sahlan reveal the disrespect with which each official treats those below him in rank and his own servility towards his superiors. The maʾmūr who shouts and threatens when talking to the ʿumda, behaves towards the governor of the province in the same way as the ʿumda behaves towards him.[3]

So accustomed was each subordinate official to this attitude on the part of his superior that a change in manner and attitude evoked the astonishment of those involved. The warm welcome the

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1. Maḥfūẓ, al-Qāhira al-Jadīda, p.66.
2. Muʾnis, Ḥ., Ahlan wa Sahlan, p.15.
3. ʿA. R. al-Sharqāwī, al-Ard, p.42.

ʿumda in Ahlan wa Sahlan receives from no less an official than the governor of the province fills him with surprise. It is the exception that proves the rule. He is confounded when the mudīr gets up from behind his desk, shakes him by the hand and greets him in the most cordial terms. The longer he stays, the greater his bewilderment, for the mudīr talks to him like "a good friend", and even asks for coffee to be served, an unprecedented event in the life of the ʿumda. He cannot help comparing the mudīr's present attitude with his former behaviour on similar occasions when he has been ordered to see him. He was always received with "a frown", and greeted by the mudīr seated. Never once did he condescend to talk to him directly by telephone. He used to issue his orders through the ḥikimdār, who asked the ma'mūr, who told the assistants, and finally the operator at the police station would inform the ʿumda of the order. The present behaviour of the mudīr strikes the ʿumda as most odd. He can only explain it as the result of "a serious upheaval in the condition of the world".[1]

Political Corruption

To understand the defects of the administrative system, it is necessary to look at the central government and its organization. For historical reasons peculiar to Egypt, certain social

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1. H. Mu'nis, Ahlan wa Sahlan, p. 304.

and political realities, impeded the success of the experiment in representative government.[1] Moreover, the Four Reserved Points of the British Declaration (1922) "inaugurated a period of uninterrupted crises in domestic Egyptian politics",[2] which in part prevented parliamentary rule from taking root in the country. From 1923 when the new Constitution was proclaimed, until the change of régime in 1952, there was a continuous struggle for power between the King and his party of "King's Friends",[3] Parliament dominated by the Wafd party, and the British Residency (later Embassy) which anxiously guarded British interests in Egypt and who "had often the last word".[4]

The 319 deputies and 172 senators[5] in Parliament belonged to seven parties, the largest of which was the Wafd. None of them had any definite political programme.[6] They were ceaselessly engaged in disputes, each party seeking to enhance the interests

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1. "In this country this long evolutionary process, which led to the establishment of representative government in many European countries, has not taken place. Egypt had remained subjected to other states superior to it in power and resources for long centuries, and for that reason the Egyptians have not been able to lay the foundations of a political public opinion or give themselves a true social and political education . . .. Since the historical development which transformed absolute rule into a democratic system has not completely taken place in Egypt, democracy is a strange system with us, a system transplanted to a milieu unprepared for it and lacking the elements necessary for its maintenance and growth." Mirrit Ghālī, The Policy of Tomorrow, p. 5.
2. P.J. Vatikiotis, The Modern History of Egypt (London, 1969), p. 265.
3. C. Issawi, Egypt at Mid-Century, p. 260.
4. Ibid., p. 261.
5. H. Ayrout, The Egyptian Peasant, p. 14.
6. M. Ghālī, The Policy of Tomorrow, p. 6.

of its members, regardless of the interests of the country. Since this representative system was based not upon an "adherence to principles" but "upon the bias of persons"[1] its harmful effects on the general running of the country were immense. Political immaturity and the selfishness of members of Parliament in general left their corrupt stamp on the spirit of the nation. The concept of government by the various parties turned politics into a game of revenge.[2] Its repercussions were felt at every level of the administration. Administrative personnel were dismissed, or retired from government service and replaced by members of the victorious political party. Constant ministerial crises led to continuous changes in government posts. "It was as if the administration was the property of the parties", writes Ghālī, "as if these parties were free to dispose of it as they came to power and distribute it in gifts to their own favourites and supporters."[3] And he adds "the administrative

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1. Ibid., p. 7.
2. In 1950 the Wafd struck against all who had kept them out of power since 1937. P.J. Vatikiotis, The Modern History of Egypt, p. 349.
3. M. Ghālī, The Policy of Tomorrow, p. 11. When Fu'ād Sirāj al-Dīn, former Minister of Finance and a leader of the Wafd, was brought to trial in 1953 he claimed that "Wafdist employees used to be dismissed in the days when the Wafd was out of power and they used to be transferred; so the (Wafdist) government was obliged to take care of them." He referred also to the practice followed by successful parties of not only reinstating their supporters but also giving them "back pay" for their time outside government employment. al-Ahrām, 24 December, 1953, p. 8.

services have become annexed to the action of parties and follow in their trail."[1]

The effect of party politics on the administration is amply illustrated in the novels concerned. It created a most uneasy atmosphere throughout the bureaucracy. Officials were constantly anxious and worried about their future. Being pliable tools in the hands of the palace and the parties, they lost all feeling of security and were in constant dread of losing their posts. It also encouraged servility to their superiors and playing for safety as a way of self-protection.

An example of the tense atmosphere prevailing in the offices during elections - and elections took place pretty frequently - or ministerial crises, is given in al-Qāhira al-Jadīda. No sooner has the news reached the officials in Qāsim Bey's department that the head of the government has "lost the sympathy of the Palace"[2] than anxiety and confusion reign. Some wonder about the future of their own chief, if the government were to resign. He is "one of the men of the present régime, well-known for his hostility to the parties."[3] Were he asked to "retire" further repercussions would ensue. Maḥjūb, a newcomer, but the Bey's secretary no less, reflects on what lies in store for him. He will undoubtedly be transferred to an "obscure post" or "thrown"

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1. M.B. Ghālī, The Policy of Tomorrow, p. 12.
2. Maḥfūẓ, al-Qāhira al-Jadīda, p. 169.
3. Ibid., p. 169.

into the distant countryside. When the news of the Cabinet's resignation is confirmed a "violent movement engulfs the officials, apparent only during resignations,"[1] comments the author. All are out in the corridors discussing the latest developments in highly agitated voices. Phrases like "the situation is grave", or "it is too bad", or "the Ministry? To hell with it!" are heard and echoed all over the place.[2]

In a revealing scene in Yawmiyyāt Nā'ib, Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm shows us the behaviour of a high official when the "new Cabinet will carry out its policy of transfer and replacement as usual among the chiefs, and the other government officials."[3] The public prosecutor on a visit to the police station, emphasises the necessity of the ma'mūr's co-operation in the search for the "strangler". "The centre is not free these days for the strangling and the heat", comes the ma'mūr's prompt answer.

- That is odd. Have you any other job besides keeping order?
- You mean you do not understand?
- No, I do not understand.
- Are we to leave the elections and turn to the murder and the strangling?
- Of course.
- The instructions we have are different . . . .[4]

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1. Ibid., p. 172.
2. Ibid.
3. T. al-Ḥakīm, Yawmiyyāt Nā'ib, p. 112.
4. Ibid., p. 114.

Insecure and frightened of the impending dismissals and transfers, officials decided to play it safe. They resorted to diverse means of self-protection, thereby neglecting their duties as the above illustration indicates or exploiting their position. Irresponsibility and flattery became the order of the day. Even those of higher moral standards were carried away by the general stream of 'safe-play'. In another enlightening episode in the same book, the public prosecutor who would otherwise not have allowed the imprisonment of innocent people by the ma'mūr, is begged by his assistant to forego his "thoroughness" for once as these are "bad times" and "politics are controling the town.

- Does it mean we should leave the people in prison when they have not committed a crime?

- Your Honour, the ma'mūr's chief, as you know, is the Minister of the Interior and the Prime Minister as well. Our chief is only the Minister of Justice. It happened in political circumstances similar to these that judges and public prosecutors took a stand against the administration. They were transferred to the Ṣa'īd.

- Does this mean we should sign the centre's books and keep silent?

- O sir, why should we be better than others?

- Well, go and let them hurry with the books. Let's get it over and done with.[1]

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1. Ibid., pp. 115-116.

The course of justice was often obstructed by political considerations. Moreover, a person often yielded to the pressures of the situation as illustrated above or was punished for his integrity. In the same novel, the judge, who is insisting that justice should prevail in a case against the police centre, is warmly advised not to do so as it would only end in his transfer to an unlikely place in Upper Egypt as has "often" been done before. He is told that the authorities once transferred a judge to the farthest corner of the Ṣa'īḍ because he let demonstrators against the government go free. This despite the fact that that judge was a "neutral and kept aloof from parties and politics". On hearing this, the present judge shakes his head indignantly and says regretfully: "Do politics violate justice, order and morals to such an extent in our country? I take refuge in God. This is something awful!"[1]

Most officials played for safety, to protect themselves from the blatant abuse of power. Even then, the slightest dissatisfaction of a senior official with his subordinate could end in his discharge or transfer. A chain of events in al-Ard illustrates to what lengths an official goes to please those in power, and the arbitrary treatment he receives from his superiors when plans are upset, irrespective of the reason.

The ma'mūr has received instructions from the governor of the province, who in turn has been ordered by the Ministry of the

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1. Ibid., pp. 131-132.

Interior, to prepar-"the biggest popular reception" for the ministers of the Sha'b party.[1] To please the government the ma'mur rounds up by force all men he can lay hands on in the streets of the various centres. Prisoners are given ordinary clothes and asked to mingle with the rest of the public who are forced to line the streets. All are instructed how to greet, shout slogans and welcome phrases, clap their hands, rejoice and dance in celebration of the ministers' visit. However "the show", for reasons quite independent of the ma'mūr, is a fiasco. The people at the crucial moment do not cooperate, nor react as they were told to do. On the contrary, they chant slogans of the rival party, the Wafd. This seals the fate of the ma'mūr. The diligence with which he arranged the whole thing is overlooked. The government he so zealously served, rewards him by transfering him to a post inthe desert, a place considered an exile for civil servants.[2]

Fear of losing one's job at the whim of a superior drives most officials to flattery and a subserviant attitude. A revealing incident is depicted in Ahlan wa Sahlan. The hikimdār who normally "gives his subordinates hell" is sweetness itself to a minor palace representative. When the latter complains of the roughness of the road, the hikimdār tries to please him by attacking the existing government "which does nothing". The next

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1. 'A.R. al-Sharqāwī, al-Ard, p.248.
2. Ibid., pp. 270-273.

minute he finds himself rebuked "as a man representing that government" for having done nothing to improve the conditions of the road. He remains silent as if he "were a schoolboy reprimanded by his teacher." He is wholly intent on finding suitable excuses, then apologises and promises to work harder. He is frightened lest this official at the palace may "whisper something into the ear of the King" which might have unpleasant results.[1]

The worst political corruption was in elections. The Electoral Law passed in 1923 provided for universal manhood suffrage. In 1925, a new electoral law was published which introduced financial requirements and qualifications for both electors and candidates.[2] The absence of any "mature public opinion", "national consciousness" and "national education"[3] left the public at the mercy of the political contestants who were on the whole disorganized and inexperienced in matters of state and parliamentary rule.[4] Worse still, politics was a question of personalities and personal ulterior motives and this has contributed greatly to "the degeneration of moral standards". For personal factors affected directly the policy of state and, consequently, the national welfare.[5]

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1. H. Mu'nis, Ahlan wa Sahlan, pp. 409-410.
2. See above, pp. 252, 255.
3. M. Ghālī, The Policy of Tomorrow, p. 8.
4. Ibid., p. 6.
5. Ibid., p. 7.

Election campaigns were a farce. From start to finish, they were staged by the political parties to exploit the ignorant and gullible. False electoral propaganda, journalistic debates, irrational and untruthful vilifications of opponents, all poured forth from each party in turn.

A lengthy and highly revealing picture of an electoral campaign is presented by al-Sibā'ī in Ard al-Nifāq. The author is very sarcastic about the conduct of the elections and choice of candidates. He ridicules the whole procedure and exposes its vices. The narrator and a friend of his have just left a marquee that has been pitched for an electoral campaign. They have been offered cold soft drinks in the name of the candidate. Close by is the opponent's marquee, a "Hithit Pasha" who offers "dinner" for his voters. They go in and take part in the "first round". Trays full of tharīd covered with lumps of meat are placed in front of the electors. Then begins the second round, the speeches. The first speaker takes his place in front of a microphone and lists the virtues of the candidate which "are as clear as the sun". He states that the candidate had had no intention of involving himself in the campaign had it not been for those "in charge among us who persuaded him . . . to save us from the state in which we are and . . . be a resounding voice and sharp sword in the Chamber of Deputies. We resorted to him because he is one of us; if we elect him, it is as if each one of us has elected himself."[1] He

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1. Y. al-Sibā'ī, Ard al-Nifāq, p. 440.

then relates the candidate to the family of the Prophet and attributes a great number of highly praised qualities to him. Later it is the candidate's turn. He reiterates the well-known promises made on such occasions: the unity of the Nile Valley under the Egyptian crown and the expulsion of the last English soldier from Egypt and the Sudan. As for internal reform, he promises the improvement of the condition of peasants and workers, a rise in the standard of living of the poor.[1] However it is the intention of the writer to expose as stated above, the candidate's deceit and his completely selfish motive for getting elected. Thus no sooner has the man drunk a "gulp of morals" than the mask drops and he appears in his true light. He declares his real aims for entering Parliament. The first is to "become a respected representative" who may one day occupy the chair of a minister and become his "High Excellency". As for politics, he admits he is totally ignorant and cares neither for the unity of the Nile Valley nor the British evacuation. Quite the contrary, it is in his interest that the British should stay. He tells those present that all he really wants is to become a "representative". He sees the whole question as a "give and take" bargain. "I'll take your votes and give you their price . . .. One vote for 50 piastres . . .. How about it?"[2]

It was common knowledge that money spent by the candidate would be regained ten times over, once he was in Parliament. In

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1. Ibid., p. 447.
2. Ibid., pp. 447-452. In an interview the author emphasised to the present writer the authenticity of the procedure depicted and how he himself witnessed the selling of votes. In an interview with Husain Munis, a similar observation was made.

Ahlan wa Sahlan there are several examples of this.[2] In the same novel a point is also made of the case with which a member of one political party can turn his coat and join the rival party.[2] Since there were no basic differences between the parties, there were no grounds upon which the choice could reasonably be made. " ... the comparison of one party with another can be made solely on the basis of the vituperation and libels which they direct at one another ...[3], wrote Ghālī.

This episode in the novel illustrates with subtle sarcasm the vapid oratory in the party's offices. Rhetoric, shouting, clapping, humbug and the sham paraphernalia of election are successful. The embezzler and defector who sees better financial prospects in the new party he has joined as it is in the ascendancy, is hailed as "a great fighter", "a liberal" and "a man of principles".[4]

Novelists also make a point of the way orders are issued by those in power to their subordinates to get certain candidates elected, irrespective of the means used to do so. This is confirmed by historical evidence. In 1952 Ismā'īl Sidqī, as Minister of Interior, ordered provincial governors and district officers to help ensure the election of government candidates.[5] Mirrit

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1. Ḥ. Mu'nis , Ahlan wa Sahlan, pp. 105, 215.
2. Ibid., pp. 257-259.
3. M. Ghālī, The Policy of Tomorrow, p. 9.
4. Ḥ. Mu'nis, Ahlan wa Sahlan, pp. 257-8.
5. P.J. Vatikiotis, op. cit., p. 276.

Ghālī in his The Policy of Tomorrow deplores the fact that governors assign to their subordinates services "which are far removed from their original duties." He states that the most common of these services "are those from which influence can be brought to bear upon the electors and specific propaganda can be administered."[1]

Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm in a relevant scene illustrates the ma'mūr's anxiety to get all the ʿumdas to elect the government nominee in their villages. Trouble makers, he tells them, they should leave to him, he will deal with them. (He imprisons all opponents as has been mentioned above[2]). The public prosecutor who is witnessing the meeting remarks jokingly that "it is well known that you belong to the party of the former cabinet," in answer to which the ma'mūr says sharply, "shut up please. All my life I have been with the new cabinet verbally. What is in one's heart is one's own business." To clear himself of any accusation of duplicity or disloyalty he quotes the well-known ḥadīth "deeds are judged according to intentions".[3]

Later, in another scene, the fraud which such a policy engenders is exposed. The ma'mūr assures the public prosecutor that "he never interferes in the elections". He tells him that his principle is "to leave the people free to choose as they wish".[4] The public prosecutor wonders whether such a policy

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1. M. Ghālī, The Policy of Tomorrow, p.11.
2. T. al-Ḥakīm, Yawmiyyāt Nā'ib, p.114.
3. Ibid., p.114.
4. Ibid., p.139.

is not dangerous to his position. The ma'mūr explains that he lets the people elect whom they want, then "I simply carry off and throw away the ballot box into the canal, and put in its place a box which we have prepared at leisure."[1]

A similar and highly indicative scene illustrating the forgery accompanying elections is presented in al-Arḍ. Here we see the unscrupulous ʿumda complying with orders of the Shaʿb Party. In order to show those in power that the whole village supports them, he writes on the electoral lists the "names of the dead and the non-resident and rallies the men forcibly."[2] Those who do not respond to his wishes are either discharged like Abū Swailem, the head watchman, or like Shaikh Hassūna transferred and their grade is lowered. Similarly, peasants known for their loyalty to a different party are sent to the police station where they are imprisoned for days, and savagely treated.[3] Whilst opponents were repressed or coerced into voicing their acceptance of the new government, the latter lost no time in gathering the fruits of office and furthering the gains of their favourites and supporters. "These governments which discharge an ʿumda from one village and a head watchman from another, which transfer a teacher from here and a headmaster from there, these same governments always offer the Pasha what he wants," reflect the helpless villagers. One such cabinet went so far as

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1. T. al-Ḥakīm, Yawmiyyāt Nāʾib, p. 139.
2. ʿA.R. al-Sharqāwī, al-Arḍ, p. 98.
3. Ibid., p. 100.

to have the land of twenty villages almost wrenched from the villagers in order to construct a road that would pass through the ʿizba of the Pasha leading to the centre of the province, thus connecting it with the main road to Cairo. Had the government repaired the bridge, the natural way to the village, it need not have deprived the peasants of any part of their land.[1]

The press was closely connected with the "false electoral propaganda".[2] In the dissemination of political ideas, the newspapers were particularly corrupt. Instead of helping the advance of public opinion, they were instrumental in bringing about its decay. No important news was given. They became the organs of one or other of the political parties, indulging in rhetoric and abuse. Editors and journalists were not even loyal to the party whose policy they professed to uphold. Journalism to them was just a way of making a living. Their services were sold to the highest bidder. Scruples if any were discarded. Wit and the ability to write bombast were all that was required to further the "views" of any political party.[3]

In his attack on the newspapers and journalists al-Sibāʿī denounces the hypocrisy of the latter and their "emptiness and mercenary attitude". They have become "sellers of words" and "traders in ideas... hired by the newspapers in return for

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1. Ibid., p.98.
2. M. Ghali, The Policy of Tomorrow, p.15.
3. Ḥ. Muʿnis, Ahlan wa Sahlan, pp. 166-167.

a monthly salary". He sees their work as "issuing articles in known quantities and at regular times", devoid of "ideas and inspiration".[1]

In the same book the author draws from his own experience in journalism and presents the reader with an illuminating detailed picture of these practices. A well-known journalist, we are told, in a "burst of confession" makes a clean breast of the workings of the press. He admits that the fiery articles he contributes daily to the newspaper attacking the present government, do not indicate his "indignation or hatred" of that government. He writes them because the proprietor has told him that such articles "satisfy the public" and "help sell the paper".[2] He goes on to relate how he was visited by a certain Pasha who "is not only a minister but the secretary of the party and the driving force of the state."[3] With great diplomacy the Pasha asks the journalist to "lessen the ferocity" of his attacks. He makes it clear that he knows full well that "change to their side" could not be made at once, and indicates his party's "readiness" to comply with all the journalist's wishes. The journalist admits that he has no qualms as "there is nothing easier for me than to praise the government with the same "fervour and logic with which I used to denounce it." The whole

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1. Y. al-Sibā'ī, Arḍ al-Nifāq, pp. 487-488.
2. Ibid., p. 483.
3. Ibid., p. 484.

issue is viewed as a question of "earning bread".[1] He ends the "confession" with sarcasm: "Why should I not be a hypocrite when I am paid for it... I who used to be a hypocrite for nothing."[2]

In Ahlan wa Sahlan in addition to a similar exposition of the hypocritical attitude of journalists we are presented with a different vice of the press, that of fraud. The editor of al-Sha'b al-Misrī newspaper, the organ of a party backed by the Palace, and his assistants, falsify the number of copies of the paper they sell. Out of 30,000 sheets of paper recorded only 3,000 are printed. The difference in the price of the sheets, the ink used, etc., is pocketed by them. Extra money is also made by falsifying the real price of any relevant machine bought.[3]

Bribery

The general impression the reader receives from the novels concerned is that bribery is widespread. Very few lower grade officials would refuse a tip and most of them expected one for services rendered which it would normally have been their duty to perform. The public was just as much accustomed to tip the officials. Through it they could obtain favoured treatment and have their business seen to more quickly instead of its lying without attention in the files, as has been illustrated earlier. Bribery became a kind of recognised tariff and provided a welcome

1. Ibid., p.486.
2. H. Mu'nis, Ahlan wa Sahlan, p.156.
3. Ibid., pp. 167-169.

supplement to the very poor salaries of minor officials. The inadequacy of government salaries encouraged the civil servant to depend on other "resources".[1] This point is highlighted in Shajarat al-Bu's. Salīm is trying to convince Khālid that what the latter calls a "bribe" is but "an entitled pay" or "an offered gift". "Names make no difference to the truth", says Khālid. "You (Salīm and the other officials) receive your salaries for the work you do ... What you take from the people is unlawful. It is nothing but a bribe". Salīm attempts to justify their case by explaining that the salary they receive "does not enable us to live". He asks Khālid whether he would blame his servant were she to steal because of hunger. "I must do my best not to force her to steal". "Well", said Salīm, "Then the government must do its best not to force us to accept bribes, but pay us adequate salaries."[2]

From King to Ministers and higher officials of the state, what could only be called corruption was universal. Ministerial portfolios and the title of pasha were bought at huge prices. No important deal went through without the King's taking his share. Scandalous fortunes were amassed by wasting public money.[3] References to and examples of administrative jobbery and financial robbery are numerous in Ahlan wa Sahlan. They all stress one

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1. M. Berger, op. cit., p. 106.
2. Ṭāhā Ḥusain, Shajarat al-Bu's, p. 111.
3. M. Ghālī, The Policy of Tomorrow, p. 8. See also Maḥkamat al-Thawra, vol. 2, 1954.

point, that corruption starts from the very top and spreads downwards. The King is described as a "big whale" whom all "feed" but who "never has enough." "He swallows land, houses and money..." [1] A prince in the neighbourhood of the village of Kafr Suhail is a "highwayman",[2] but unlike real highwaymen who risk their lives and fight, the prince makes use of the governor and district police to get him what he wants: so many acres of land between the canal and the Nile; a hundred or two hundred cattle; a number of men to build a bridge and so on.[3] As for the governor, he robs the people of their money without fear or shame and accepts bribes openly, relying on the favour of the Prince in return for the services he has rendered him.[4]

Leading members of the parties exploit the ignorant and rob them of hundreds of pounds under the pretext of contributions to the party.[5] This money is then shared among themselves or with the palace staff. Rifqī Pasha, the secretary of the King's Party, tricks the ʿumda into paying £E 200 as a contribution which he spends the same evening on a party at which drinking and gambling take place.[6]

Al-ʿAib, a novel by Idrīs, deals with bribery at length. In fact, the whole novel revolves round this practice among government officials and is highly revealing. Everyone high and low

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1. Ḥ. Muʿnis, Ahlan wa Sahlan, p.105.
2. Ibid., p.33.
3. Ibid., pp. 25, 33.
4. Ibid., p.34.
5. Ibid., p.107.
6. Ibid., pp. 217-218.

is in league. Everyone gets a share of the "sum" paid by a citizen who is usually a business man in a hurry to get a licence. Throughout the novel one gets the impression that the whole thing is efficiently organized, in contrast with the chaos usually reigning in government offices, where real work is concerned. The plot revolves round the reactions of a conscientious young woman, a newcomer to the department, when she discovers as days pass by, that the office which she is sharing with four men officials is engaged in something beyond the ordinary issuing of licences. This is only the official line, the lighter of the two jobs, and the less important. Behind the innocent façade the real work is conducted; the "selling of licences". Sarcastically the author observes that no prices have been fixed by the administration or Ministry. The value of each is laid down by tradition, which one set of officials inherits from its predecessors."[1] We are told that it is an operation "with its own set of rules and laws."[2] It is carried out with great discretion on the part of the "client" and strange audacity by the officials. The link is the janitor standing at the door of the office. He classifies the clients, sends off the "undesirables", and lets in those he senses "can pay". The next step is taken by one of the officials who conducts the whole business, "receives the money" and distributes it among his colleagues in the office. He

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1. Y. Idrīs, al-ʿAib, p.44.
2. Ibid., p.45.

also acts as the liason officer between their office and "the big heads". Each is given an agreed sum of "the secret income."[1]

It is interesting to note the attempts of the four officials to draw the newcomer into their net. The head of the office, a fatherly figure, tries to justify their action by arguing that what they do is not robbery. The citizens who offer the money are "rich" and they "do not force a person to pay". As for the government he asks, "What does it lose? Are we embezzling its money?"[2] Accused of the immorality of it all he simply draws a line between "morals" and what he calls "the neccesities of life". Of greater interest is the quoting of Qur'anic verses when the 'illegal deal' is transacted.[3]

It is of immense value to observe that such conduct is not condemned by the author. The low standard of economic morality appears to be accepted. The fault of the plot lies in the weakness of the argument in defence of bribery. The action is justified on economic grounds. But the reasons given, "the large family" and the "inadequate salary", within the context of the novel are not strong enough to be sufficiently convincing. The whole question is over-simplified and neither the moral, not the economic issues, or for that matter the social, are satisfactorily explored.

Tips and fat wads of banknotes slipped into the hands or "drawer"[4] of an official are not the only method of bribery depicted

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1. Ibid.
2. Ibid., p. 64.
3. Ibid., p. 63.
4. Ibid., p. 116.

in the novels. In Yawmiyyāt Nā'ib, the bribe is a "sheep" and the person bribed a "judge". The judge relates how one day a peasant came to his house with a sheep and said: "The gift". "What gift?" said I. He said: "The gift we agreed upon were you to induce my wife to return to me . . .." "I understood . . . The peasant had gone to the wrong judge."[1]

Al-Arḍ introduces a haughty sergeant-major who is ready to forgo orders and close an eye for a day, giving the desperate peasants time to gather some of the cotton that is going to be destroyed once the construction of the new road through their fields begins. This he will do if Abū Swailem is "clever and smart" enough. "Pay a pound and you can attend to your crop,"[2] he whispers in the peasant's ear.

In the same novel, Muḥammad Afandī, the village school teacher, has to pay ten pounds, the sum asked for by the rich landowner, as part of his "expenses" for undertaking the journey to Cairo in order to "present the petition to the government" as he puts it, though he has no intention of doing so.[3] Earlier in the story the assistant who accompanies the engineer on his rounds in the fields to make sure that government orders concerning the irrigation of fields are obeyed, comes back later and for 20 piastres each turns on the water wheels which he and the engineer had stopped a while ago.[4]

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1. T. al-Ḥakīm, Yawmiyyāt Nā'ib, pp. 134-135.
2. 'A.R. al-Sharqāwī, al-Arḍ, p. 396.
3. Ibid., p. 138.
4. Ibid., p. 65.

It was common among officials of higher ranks to expect or demand what they called the "exquisite presents of the countryside" from any villager of standing coming to Cairo on business. When such a 'gift' is not forthcoming as is the case with the 'umda in Ahlan wa Sahlan, he is asked straightforwardly and without any sense of shame whether a porter should accompany him to the hotel. "Why?" asks the 'umda. "To bring us a few pairs of chickens . . .," answers the official. This kind of request is earlier explained by a "proof-reader" to his friend; "goods" from the countryside have become a common practice with the "high masters". "They trade in poultry," just as they trade in "principles", in "words", in short, they trade in everything.[1]

Dishonesty in financial matters is similarly widespread, not only among officials but the public as a whole. Respectable and responsible citizens behave in an unscrupulous way. In Yawmiyyāt Nā'ib, the author relates how, in a small town, the inhabitants saw the need of having a properly equipped pharmacy. The better off among them contributed a sum of money and a well equipped pharmacy was founded. A chemist was appointed and the judge was made treasurer. But soon strife broke out between the chemist and the treasurer, the former accusing the judge of almost emptying the shop with his constant demands for "soap", "scent", "sweets", etc.

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1. H. Mu'nis, Ahlan wa Sahlan, pp. 163, 261.

and the large quantities of tea and coffee he ordered for himself and his friends and relatives who gathered daily round the shop without ever paying for anything.[1]

In Ahlan wa Sahlan, a few of the comic scenes illustrate the corruption of the public. The devious ways they resort to in order to avoid paying fares, rents etc., and the means of fooling the naive among the public or officials, show how the people sometimes get a little of their own back under such a corrupt system. There is a hilarious scene in which a great number of third class passengers on a train to Cairo disappear at a moment's notice under the seats, or climb out of the windows on to the roof of the train to evade the ticket inspector.[2] Another scene, illustrates to what lengths a man goes in order to extort money from apparently well-off persons. He deliberately injures his head, then accuses the chosen victim of having inflicted the wound on him.[3]

As mentioned earlier, not much of this side of life under the new régime is reflected in the novels considered. In reality, despite the attempts made when the new government came into power in 1952, the granting of special favours in return for "tips" is still widespread.[4] Moreover, with the power of the State ever expanding while salaries remain low, government officials are strongly tempted to accept bribes. Nor have things improved in the general

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1. T. al-Ḥakīm, Yawmiyyāt Nā'ib, pp. 132-133.
2. Ḥ. Mu'nis, Ahlan wa Sahlan, p. 100.
3. Ibid., pp. 128-132.
4. From the present writer's own experience.

running of the administrative system.[1] Too many rules and their too rigid application only cause delay and waste. The ineptitude and irresponsible attitude of government officials add to the waste and corruption.

Though most authors have reflected the political and administrative corruption in their novels, the issue has not been examined profoundly or its seriousness stressed. Except in al-Sibā'ī's Arḍ al-Nifāq corruption is not even attacked. In most cases, as illustration have shown, the authors have presented the problem as it was actually practised in real life. The political, social and above all, economic implications are overlooked. (Ṭāhā Ḥusain's Shajarat al-Bu's is an exception to a certain extent.) Various aspects of corruption are exposed. Its universality among all classes is reflected. It is dealt with sarcastically by a few. But nowhere is there an indication why it is such a common disease. Nor are there suggestions about how this evil could be stamped out, unless al-Sibā'ī's call for "better morals" can be considered a plausible solution. A higher standard of morality is essential for any improvement. However, it is of little value if presented in a vacuum. Such a deeply rooted 'tradition' cannot be solved simply by making everyone drink a "dose of morals".[2] To improve man's morals needs more than the wishful dream of the author. The question is far more complex.

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1. P. Mansfield, Nasser's Egypt, p. 166,
2. See Chapter I, p. 105.

The deeper reasons peculiar to the political, economic and social history of the country have to be studied. Concepts of work, loyalty, duty, government have to take on a different meaning if any far-reaching results are to be achieved. Notions of honesty, fairness, efficiency and discretion need to be developed. This entails a complete re-education of the individual, an economic organization, a scientific and technological advance. Through a combination of these a new type of moral commitment to work will be produced and loyalty to state and public developed.

CHAPTER IV

WOMEN

Historical Background

> The women came out protesting,
> I stood watching their gathering,
> And lo! They made their black dresses their insignia,
> They appeared like stars, shining in the
> midst of darkness,
> And went on crossing the road,
> Their destination the house of Sa'd.[1]

For the first time in the history of modern Egypt did the Egyptian women appear in public and take part in a nation-wide issue, the uprising of 1919. The majority of the participants came from the upper classes,[2] nevertheless, the incident is of major importance. It reflects a growing tendency among the more liberal minded of the educated sector, in the urban society, towards allowing women a greater share of freedom than they had been permitted hitherto.

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1. Ḥāfiẓ Ibrāhīm, Dīwān Ḥāfiẓ Ibrāhīm (Cairo, 1939), vol. II, p. 87.

2. They were organized by Ṣafiyya Zaghlūl, and took part in building barricades and destroying communications. See Sir Valentine Chirol, The Egyptian Problem (London, 1920), p. 167.

Less than two decades earlier, Qāsim Amīn, on the publication of his two books, Taḥrīr al-Mar'a (1898) and al-Mar'a al-Jadīda (1900), came under severe attack from various circles.[1] His call for the emancipation of woman, her education, her discarding the veil and her taking her rightful position in society, were bitterly denounced by the fuqahā' as contradictory to Islamic teaching. His systematic handling of the subject and his logical presentation did not prevent even those educated in secular schools from accusing him of "treachery against country and religion".[2] However, Qāsim Amīn stood firm by what he sincerely believed to be the main factor in a nation's progress: improving the position of its women. He argues that all the ideas propagated by those who want to improve the social conditions and "guide the nation to the road of success", in conformity with the "prosperous" and "powerful West" will leave no trace unless "they reach women". Once the latter understand the meaning of what is involved they will "mould their children in the best of images". For there is "no hope that homes and families will become that good environment, unless women are educated and take part in men's thoughts, hopes and sufferings . . .".[3]

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1. The Azhar, the Khedive and the extreme nationalists led by Muṣṭafā Kāmil. P.J. Vatikiotis, The Modern History of Egypt, p.224.

2. Qāsim Amīn, al-Mar'a al-Jadīda (Cairo, 1900), p.216.

3. Ibid., pp.213-215.

The question of woman seemed to have gathered force at the end of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth, when urban society was undergoing a process of Westernization. Newspapers and magazines became the battlefield where both contestants, conservative and liberal waged the war for or against the emancipation of women in the most declamatory manner.[1]

Egyptian women, however, contributed very little to this press campaign.[2] Malak Ḥifnī Nāṣif (1886-1918) was the first to do so. She wrote articles that were published in the progressive al-Jarīda, on the sad condition of women and the tyrannical attitude of men towards them. Influenced by Amīn's writings on questions of marriage, polygamy and divorce, her outlook, however, is more restricted and less liberal. There is no doubt that she felt strongly about the degraded position of her kind, devoting much of her time writing or lecturing on various aspects of

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1. There was hardly a magazine or newspaper which did not occupy itself with the issue. Muṣṭafā Kāmil's al-Liwā' was most conservative in outlook. al Muqtaṭaf and al-Hilāl, published by the Syrian emigrés were in the forefront, defending the call for the emancipation of women. So did Aḥmad Luṭfī, the Egyptian editor of al-Jarīda, which voiced the opinion and views of the progressive Egyptians.

2. Editors and owners of women's magazines that appeared on the scene before the turn of the century were Syrian and Lebanese. M. Hartmann, The Arabic Press of Egypt (Leiden, 1899), pp. 46-48.

women's emancipation. Her conventional background[1] may have restrained her from propounding more progressive ideas.[2]

It was the First World War with its political and economic impact on Egypt, that led to the release of women from their centuries long, life of seclusion. The fact that women ventured out of their homes in force, as mentioned above, took by surprise the whole of society, men and women alike.[3] One point has to be made clear from the start. The "Woman's Cause" was almost entirely an upper and middle-class movement. Women of the upper class took the lead in calling for the emancipation of their sex, whilst middle-class women following in their wake, were to benefit most from any change that occurred. The freedom the middle-class girl enjoyed as late as 1960 was far from complete, but was a considerable step from a life of utter seclusion. This transformation is reflected in a number of the early and mid-twentieth century novels.[4]

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1. Her father was regarded as an eminent religious figure of the traditional school. Malak Ḥifnī Nāṣif, al-Nisā'iyyāt (Cairo, n.d.), pp. 117-118.

2. On the question of discarding the veil, she stated that "had we been brought up in the habit of displaying the face and were our menfolk prepared for it, I would have allowed it to whoever wanted it. But the majority of the nation is not prepared for it at the moment". Ibid., pp. 107-109.

3. Durriyya Shafīq, al-Mar'a al- Miṣriyya min al-Farā'ina ilā al-Yawm, (Cairo, 1955), pp. 119-121.

4. Haykal's Zainab, al Ḥakīm's 'Audat al Rūḥ, Maḥfūẓ's Trilogy and al-Qāhira al-Jadīda, and Idrīs' al-'Āib.

Women of the lower class, urban and rural, have hardly been affected by the call for emancipation. Poverty and ignorance proved too great a gap between the women belonging to the masses and the few educated well-off, of the upper stratum.

A sign of the change in women's condition was the founding in 1923 of the "Feminist Union"[1] by Hudā Sha'rāwī. Social and intellectual improvement of the Egyptian woman was stressed and given priority over women's political rights. Hudā Sha'rāwī herself was not keen on women entering politics.[2] One of the first demands made by the Union under her leadership was the raising of the age of marriage for girls.[3] It also called most strongly for the reform of the marriage and divorce laws, the yoke under which Egyptian women existed and still do.[4] The first demand was successful. In 1924 the government raised to sixteen the age at which a girl was allowed to marry.[5] Such legislation challenged

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1. A few women societies were formed in the first decade of the twentieth century, but their effect was minimal. See al-Jarīda, 6th June 1908.

2. al-Musawwar, 2nd September 1927.

3. R.F. Woodsmall, Muslim Women enter a New World, (London, 1936) p. 100.

4. Baer, Population and Society in the Arab East, p. 36.

5. J.N.D. Anderson "Law Reform in Egypt: 1850-1950" Political and Social Change in Modern Egypt, ed. by P.M. Holt, p. 225.

the validity of the Sharī'a, where no lower limit had been stated. But it showed an awakening to the menace of child-marriage. The ease with which opponents could circumvent the law, since birth certificates in many cases did not exist, led to the Union's urgent advocation of compulsory birth registration.[1]

The question of polygamy[2] and the necessity of its restriction or abolition was a constant item on the agenda of the Union and most emphatically advocated by Mrs. Sha'rāwī herself. However proposals concerning marriage to a second wife were still under consideration forty years after the first recommendations were made. The 1960 draft law of personal status which regarded marriage to a second wife as a ground for divorce of the first is still (1970) not operational.[3]

Numerous women's organisations and societies came into existence during the thirties and forties of this century. They were mainly concerned with social activities and public health and their effect on the whole was negligible. The greater number of those in charge came from the upper circles and were detached from the main problems that beset the masses. Moreover, being of the

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1. R.F. Woodsmall, op. cit., p. 100.

2. The Cabinet drafted legislation to restrict polygamy and actively to restrain a husband from exercising his right of repudiation. King Fu'ād refused to approve these particular provisions and they were not included in Law No. 25 of 1929. Anderson, op. cit., p. 225.

3. Baer, Population and Society, pp. 54-55. The Ministry of Social Affairs proposed certain amendments to the law of personal status concerning polygamy. It was defeated in 1943.

leisured class, they were in search of a diversion that would absorb their time, instead of furthering the cause of women and pressing for a general improvement in her social, economic and political position. They sought the limelight and confined themselves to the big cities (Cairo, Alexandria) neglecting the areas where real backwardness existed, the countryside and the crowded urban quarters.[1]

The only women's organisation demanding full political rights for women was Ittiḥād Bint al Nīl (Union of the Daughter of the Nile) founded by Durriyya Shafīq in 1949. The methods she employed to gain her case were considered sensational. At one time she and her adherents went on a hunger strike, at another she "stormed" the Chamber of Deputies to allow members of her union to sit in Parliament.[2]

In both his books on the emancipation of women, Qāsim Amīn stressed again and again the importance and value of education for girls. He argues that the main malady from which all families suffer, rich and poor, high and low, is the "ignorance of women".[3] Her lack of education renders her "a creature given to emotional

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1. al-Hilāl, April 1955, p. 38.

2. Durriyya Shafīq, op.cit., pp. 255-261.

3. Qāsim Amīn, Taḥrīr al-Mar'a (Cairo, n.d.), p. 30.

excesses, indulging in extremes of joy and grief".[1] Only through education, he continues, can a woman "conceive sound ideas and get rid of superstition".[2] He makes it clear that women of the upper and middle classes are so far behind their educated husbands, that life for both of them becomes joint misery for he "seems to exist in a world of his own and his wife in a world of hers".[3] But he does not blame woman. "Men are to be blamed . . . those who have neglected the education of our women".[4] "And yet," he states sarcastically, "people here (Egypt) still believe that a woman's education is not necessary. Nay, they even wonder whether to teach her how to read and write is legal or prohibited by the Sharī'a!"[5]

Though Amīn is the most outstanding and influential figure in the call for woman's emancipation and the importance and need for her education, he was not the first to propagate these views. Almost fifty years earlier, an Azharite of peasant stock took up the question of woman and called for her education.[6]

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1. Ibid., pp. 28-29.
2. Ibid., pp. 20-21.
3. Ibid., p. 31.
4. Ibid., p. 29.
5. Ibid., p. 19.
6. R.R. al-Ṭahṭāwī, Takhlīṣ al-Ibrīz, p. 16.

Rifāʿa al-Ṭahṭāwī was the first Egyptian to decry the state of woman in Egypt. Having had the opportunity during his stay in France to observe the respectable place the French woman held in that country and the important role she played in society, he became aware that the Oriental woman in comparison was but "part of the furniture of the house",[1] and expressed the need for equal treatment of boys and girls where education is concerned. He even advocated education for girls as a means of obtaining a living when forced by circumstances. Ṭahṭāwī's ideas were advanced when seen against the backwardness of the country and the conservative attitude of the people in general at the time.

Rifāʿa al-Ṭahṭāwī was soon supported by another Egyptian Azharite, ʿAlī Mubārak. Mubārak, progressive and practical, stressed the importance of education for all, girls in particular. Through their combined efforts, two secondary schools for girls were founded (1873).[2] The experiment was not successful. The mental climate was far from ready to accept such an advanced step, though Khedive Ismāʿīl, was not averse to the idea, in his anxiety to Westernize the country.

The question of education for girls gathered momentum after the First World War. Its value was recognized by the less conventional

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1. Ibid., p. 63.

2. Badr, Taṭawwur al Riwāya al-ʿArabiyya al-Ḥadīthaفī Miṣr, p. 26.

urban society. It came to be regarded among the middle and upper classes as a social asset, for the sake of which certain concessions towards women's freedom could be made. However, the awakened desire of parents for their daughters to be educated, after the 1919 uprising did not reflect a genuine concern for the emancipation of girls. Despite the gain in prestige by imitating the few enlightened progressive elements among the upper class, Hudā Sha'rāwī and Nabawiyya Mūsā fought against strong opposition from conservative forces to get girls to continue their secondary studies.[1]

The real furore came when girls demanded entrance to the University. Opponents of women's higher education gathered force and roused the ignorant public against the whole idea. Aḥmad Luṭfī al-Sayyid, the first director of the University of Cairo (Fu'ād), had to resort to subterfuge to accept the first candidates.[2] The first college to accept women students was the Faculty of Medicine in 1928. Women were allowed to become doctors to enable them to attend female patients, who had been conditioned to prefer death rather than let a male doctor examine them. From

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1. The real landmark as regards girls' education is the year 1925 when girls' secondary education was officially established. See Woodsmall, op. cit., p. 176.

2. Ibid., p. 177. Admission was made according to qualifications, with no reference to the sex of the applicant.

then on, a steady increase in the number of women students followed,[1] despite the various discomforts they encountered daily,[2] not the least from the male students who considered them as infringing on their domain.[3] Recently al-Azhar accepted women students, a striking event in the history of this bastion of conservatism.

The increase in the number of girls attending the University is no indication of a change in the traditional outlook of society concerning both sexes.[4] Women undergraduates are generally confined to one side of the lecture room and resort to their own common room during the break.[5] Segregation of the sexes is still the accepted norm. And the valid criterion in assessing a student's character, whether male or female is the extent to which he or she refrains from mixing with the other sex.[6]

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1. Baer, Population and Society, p. 49. The percentage of girls in all schools rose from 14 to 40 per cent in the period between the two World Wars (from 1913-14 to 1944-45).

2. Amīna al-Sa'īd, "Min Yawmiyyāt Ṭāliba" al-Hilāl al-Māsī, December 1967, pp. 246-253.

3. They are admitted now to the four existing Universities.

4. Baer, Population and Society, p. 42, also from my own experience.

5. L. al-Zayyāt, al-Bāb al-Maftūh, p. 207; al-Hilāl, March-April 1946, p. 165.

6. The Middle East Journal, vol. 7, 1953, p. 298; also from my own experience.

Advance in women's education resulted in her entering the professional field. Women teachers were the first to be officially recognized. The number of women doctors, lawyers, social workers and nurses, is steadily growing. So also is the number of women employed in government offices.[1]

Inferiority of Woman

With her greater chance of education and wider opportunities for work, woman's status has been slightly modified, but has undergone no fundamental change. A girl in 1960 was regarded as an inferior being, as her mother or even her grandmother before her.[2] The life of the new generation of the educated is not an easy one. They are torn between the old established views of women's inferiority to man, manifest in all spheres of the society they live in, and their Western inspired concept of woman as an

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1. In 1955, out of about 2,000 University trained women employed by the government in Cairo, 80 per cent were in the Ministry of Education. There were also 142 women doctors working in the government, a few social workers and a small number presenting various other professions. The Role of Women in the Development of Egypt, a paper by Laila Shukry al-Ḥamāmsy, Social Research Centre, A.U.C., p. 14; See also Suhair al-Qalamāwī, "al-Mar'a min al-Harīm ilā al-Ḥukm", al-Hilāl, March 1965, p. 69.

2. Ḥawwā', No. 588, December 1967.

individual in her own right.[1] This conflict between the old and traditional and the new and liberal is voiced in a discussion with her girl friends on the modern position of woman in al-Bāb al-Maftūḥ by 'Adīla, a secondary school girl, who herself complies with the social conventions. On comparing their lot with that of their mothers' she sarcastically comments that they are "worse off". "At least our mothers knew where they stood, whereas we are lost. We do not know whether we are ḥarīm or not, whether love is lawful or a sin. Our families say it is a sin, whilst the state wireless plays love songs the whole day. The books tell the girl that she is free. Were she to believe that, it would be a disaster, her reputation would be sullied . . .. Honestly, aren't we wretched (creatures)?"[2]

The pressure of deeply-rooted traditions and social customs weighs heavily on the educated woman, who is aware of what is denied to her. She longs for a world where there is freedom of expression and an unfettered response to life. In al-Bāb al-Maftūḥ, Laṭīfa al-Zayyāt, by placing her seventeen-year-old heroine, Lailā, in a situation typical of that of a middle class girl, indicates clearly the damaging impact a conventional home has on an intelligent girl with a bright and cheerful disposition. Raised by a father who firmly believes in the subordination and

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1. Ibid.

2. L. al-Zayyāt, op. cit., p. 71.

weakness of woman, and a no less conventionally conditioned mother, Lailā grows up in an atmosphere where a strict conformity to rules is applied to the female.[1] From a bright-eyed, life-loving being, Lailā is transformed into a listless, emotionally and mentally unbalanced creature. "She walks as if she is chained by heavy shackles . . . in all her movements there is heaviness and fright".[2] "Layers upon layers of sadness and despair lie heavy on her chest . . . until they choke her".[3]

The fact that the Qur'ān declared in unequivocal terms, the pre-eminence of man[4] and established his dominance over woman, lent a sacredness to the traditional view of woman's inferiority and "set a permanent seal of subjection on the female sex".[5] To defy age old customs that have been religiously approved would be tantamount to blasphemy in the eyes of an Islamic society, rejected and condemned. By remaining within the conventional framework of Islam, modern interpreters (from Muḥammad ʿAbduh to Khālid M. Khālid) failed to bring about a radical solution to the problem of woman, manifest in her inferior status.

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1. Ibid., pp. 21-23.
2. Ibid., p. 24.
3. Ibid., p. 28.
4. Qur'ān, Sūra IV[34], II[282] (Islam assesses one man as equal to two women).
5. Baer, Population and Society, p. 35.

Islam's preference for the male is strongly apparent in the attitude of all classes of society towards both sexes, from the moment they are delivered into the world. It is most evident in the village community. Discrimination against girls is unquestioned. Woman under the threat of divorce, as long as she gives birth to daughters only, makes no secret of her preference for boys. Only with the birth of a boy does she feel relatively secure as is clearly reflected in the following lines from a folk song:

> When they said it is a boy,
> My waist was made strong without a girdle,

Whereas, her reaction to the birth of a girl would be as if "the pillars of the house have collapsed on me".

Girls are conditioned into believing in the superiority of the male. In order to please their parents they give up their share of meat and sweets - a rarely obtainable luxury in the village community - to their brothers. Many an urban girl denies herself personal comforts, in order to help a brother towards a more promising future.[1]

Numerous illustrations of society's preference for the male and his superiority may be cited from the novels. However, as the subject will be elaborated later, when dealing with the

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1. Nafīsa, Ihsān and Sanā' in Maḥfūẓ. Bidāya wa Nihāya, al-Qāhira al-Jadīda and Idrīs, al-'Aib, respectively.

relationship between the sexes, an example or two will suffice here. In al-Bāb al Maftūḥ, the different attitude of Lailā's father to her, on reaching womanhood, from the one he displayed on the day he observed the growth of hair on her brother's chin and upper lip, shocks her profoundly. His delight and joy at the discovery of the latter, turn to sorrow and lament in her case.[1]

In al-Ard, there is no one specific incident to illustrate the above mentioned fact, but the whole atmosphere of the novel reflects the supremacy of the male peasant, in the scornful way he treats the female and the respect he demands and expects of her, for no other reason than that he is a male.[2]

The peasant woman accepts her inferior position as a pre-ordained fact. Nor has she been enlightened otherwise. ". . . the women are where they were. Mud and flies, a congested village, the Nile water to drink, a baby born every year . . . this is the life of a fellaheen woman today as it was in the past".[3] It holds true in the sixties of the twentieth century just as it did in the thirties when Miss Woodsmall visited the Nile valley. A remark made by a peasant woman during that trip

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1. ʿA. al-Zayyāt, op. cit., pp. 21-22.

2. ʿA. al-Sharqāwī, al-Ard, pp. 119, 124.

3. R.F. Woodsmall, Moslem women enter a new world, p. 343.

is a significant illustration of the view a peasant female holds of herself. When questioned as to the effect change had on her, she answered: "What should we know of change? We're just women".[1]

Ignorance

Woman's passive acceptance of her worthlessness, the result of centuries of prejudice against her, and man's unchallenged and sanctified power over her, is caused by her ignorance and its effect. The apparent change in the condition of middle class women hardly affected the lower classes, rural or urban, a fact manifest in the ignorance displayed by the masses. It is best illustrated in the stranglehold superstition has on them. Having had no schooling at all or very little, their lives follow an empty and dull pattern. In Ḥawwā'bilā Ādam, Ṭāhir Lāshīn comments on such an idle existence as that of Ḥawwā''s grandmother, typical of her generation and no less true of the female masses of the present day. "It is a life based on the emotions, where the brain is stagnant . . .." The only job when called upon, is for it to cling "to optimism or pessimism, give weight to dreams and then to contact the jinn and the devils, giving each a name . . . a form and a title . . . and allegiance is sworn unto them." He concludes that thus "the sick brain submits to those asyād which it invented."[2]

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1. Ibid.

2. Lāshīn, Ḥawwā'bilā Ādam, pp. 33-34.

Women whose whole life is centred on the other sex and whose whole existence derives its importance from belonging to man, spend a lifetime in pursuit of magic cures, effective charms and powerful formulae to secure their future: the hunt for a husband, or the attempt to keep him.[1] Their visits to 'devout' living shaikhs for the purpose of special requests, or tombs of favourite saints with offerings for having answered a vow (nidr) they made, are commonplace.

Zannūba in ʿAudat al-Rūḥ is a striking example of the appalling ignorance of women of the lower order. She tries to see the future in the cards, interpreting the 'pictures' according to her dreams.[2] Failing in her attempt to achieve anything positive through them, she next pays a visit to the sanctuary of al-Sayyida Zainab[3] "silently chanting the Fātiḥa" to the "Pure Lady".[4]

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1. al-Ḥakīm, ʿAudat al-Rūḥ, vol. I, p. 68.

2. Ibid., p. 11.

3. The daughter of the Imām ʿAlī, and grand-daughter of Muḥammad. The mosque of Sayyida Zainab, is but little inferior in sanctity to the most sacred of all sanctuaries in Cairo, the mosque of al-Ḥusain. See E.W. Lane, The manners and customs of the modern Egyptians, p. 243.

4. al-Ḥakīm, ʿAudat al-Rūḥ, vol. I, p. 62.

Finally she makes up her mind and goes to shaikh Samḥān, where she finds the waiting room full of women, each expecting her wish to come true by a "karāmah" performed by the 'deceased' shaikh. When Zannūba's turn comes, she is led into an almost empty room with a "semblance of a tomb in the middle of it". The pound note, she is asked to pay is, as the shaikh's "wife" explains, for the sole reason of buying "a white sheep with no sign . . . to be slaughtered on that door and the threshold painted with its blood . . . and by the will of God and the blessing of the asyād the doors of happiness and felicity will open unto you".[1]

However, Zannūba wonders if she can have a written charm. "Of course," says the woman, 'you shall have the charm and incense too." To Zannūba's astonishment she asks her to get a "wisp" of hair from the "crown" of the man she has in mind, and the "heart" of an "orphan hoopoe". "Any charm made of these will never fail,"[2] she concludes emphatically. Zannūba, actually sends Mabrūk, her brother's servant to look for an "orphan hoopoe" and is only frightened into giving up the search by her brother's threat of depriving her of the housekeeping money if she wastes it on "such nonsense".[3]

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1. Ibid., p. 71.
2. Ibid., vol. I, p. 73.
3. Ibid., vol. I, pp. 110-111.

Any affliction of the heart or mind is usually attributed to the works of "lower spirits". Ḥawwā', heart broken, when she learns of Ramzī's engagement is unable to control herself any longer. She bursts into tears which shake her whole body. Her grandmother, ignorant of the real cause of Ḥawwā''s distress, is frightened out of her wits and calls the help of all God's saints, the living and the dead, making vows to them, has recourse to 'fortune tellers' and when almost in despair seeks the advice and aid of shaikh Muṣṭafā who sells all sorts of concoctions and charms. He asks her to light a fire and requests Ḥawwā' to put on a white shawl. Then he burns incense in the fire and orders her to cross it seven times, gazes into her eyes and mumbles incomprehensible words and phrases until she falls into a deep sleep. At that he turns to the grandmother and others who are present, shakes his head regretfully and says: "Poor Ḥawwā' . . . she is touched by one of the mighty spirits," and he suggests they should leave her in the hands of God. He'll know how to cure her.[1]

Woman's ignorance is also evident in the importance she attaches to physical appearance, whether her own or that of the male. Her life is spent on seeking or applying prescriptions that would add pounds to her figure, in accordance with the

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1. Lāshīn, op. cit., pp. 137-141.

accepted notion that she is there to gratify the appetite of man, hence the plumper, the more desired by the other sex she will be.[1]

The life of a lower middle class or peasant woman is governed to a large degree by the various superstitions she believes in. As a wife she secures the help of the jinn', wears charms, burns incense, makes vows and offerings, to ensure conception or the birth of a boy. As a mother she hangs charms and alum on her young offspring to counteract the evil eye. And as a woman she is busy casting spells on others, whose existence she fears or whose desire she covets.[2]

A firm belief in superstitions is not the only aspect of woman's ignorance. Most of them educated and uneducated, suffer from an incapacity for realistic judgement. Rarely do they display any comprehension of the basic elements of life, such as love, religion, ethics, money and their connection with people's relationships, conflicts and frustrations. Women novelists though more interested in presenting the problem of their sex, do not show any deep grasp of or insight into the forces that mould a society. Women in reality or in fiction generally behave according to the dictates not of their intellect, but of their emotions. Even those are warped. They bear the stamp of centuries of

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1. See Maḥfūẓ, Khān al-Khalīlī, p. 117.

2. al-Ḥakīm, ʿAudat al-Rūḥ, I, p. 68; Ṭāhā Ḥusain, Shajarat al-Buʾs, p. 39; Duʿāʾ al-Karawān, pp. 46-48.

seclusion, suppression and mistrust. Nor does the impact on them of the conventional conception of woman as 'lacking in wit', dishonest, inconsistent, unstable and wily help. Out of their seclusion, they imagined themselves having gained freedom and work and plan on that rather naive assumption. A few, after bitter disappointments and disillusionments realize the truth. Though no longer the prisoners of four walls, they are nevertheless, their own prisoners and prisoners of the conventional attitude of the environment in which they live.[1]

The essence of the problem for those who are aware of the situation, among the educated, is their fear of the reaction of society to their behaviour, if they no longer comply with the accepted conventions. Conditioned from early years by family and society, to consider marriage as the only respectable life for woman, they want the status of a wife. This brings them into conflict with their newly acquired - western inspired - principles. Living in a predominantly man's world, their fear of man's prejudice, deters them from remaining loyal to these principles, and is the main factor in their unbalanced stand.[2] They oscillate between defiance and submission to the accepted order of things.

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1. L. al-Zayyāt, op. cit., pp. 70-71, 131, 165; Lāshīn, op. cit., pp. 86-88, 129.

2. L. al-Zayyāt, op. cit., pp. 131, 151, 165.

Moreover, their restricted freedom is a great handicap towards gaining better experience of life. Their lack of it renders them vulnerable and immature in judgement.[1] They seem not to realize that their desire for freedom and their commitment to standards of social appearance are incompatible. To be treated as individuals, they have to grasp the fact that the solid block of conventions has to be overcome first. For them to succeed involves a complete change in psychology, theirs as well as man's. Amīna, the heroine of Anā Ḥurra, and the only female character in the novels who attains, to a large degree, freedom of action and independence of thought, does so because she is aware of the obstacles barring her path to real emancipation, and acts in the light of that knowledge.

Lack of Freedom

Nowhere is the unreality of woman's freedom more evident than in the question of marriage. Whether as a daughter or a wife she is subject to the power of the father, or the predominance of the husband respectively. In the case of a daughter, she is a mere member of the household, whose destiny is planned by the father according to his fancies and without the expectation of any challenge to his authority.[2]

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1. Ibid., pp. 110-111, 143; Lāshīn, op. cit., pp. 126-129.

2. Haykal, Zainab, p. 125; also Maḥfūẓ, Bain al-Qasrain, pp. 179-180.

In al-Bāb al Maftūḥ, Lailā's father congratulates his daughter joyfully, telling her that he has just read the Fātiḥa, with Dr. Ramzī who asked for her hand in marriage. Lailā's first thought is that "no one has consulted her", neither her father nor Dr. Ramzī "as if someone else is going to get married", and she is a university student in her final year.[1]

A girl's carefree existence as a child is drastically changed on reaching womanhood. A set of new rules, restricting her movements are imposed upon her. "From now on," says Lailā's father on that eventful day mentioned earlier,[2] "you are not allowed to go out on your own. Visits are not permitted . . . straight from school to the house." He then turns to her brother Maḥmūd and says: "I do not wish to see any cheap romances or magazines in the house . . . read whatever you choose outside the house, or hide it. I do not want anything to poison the girl's thoughts. Nor do I see any necessity for your friends to visit you at home . . . the coffee-house and the club are sufficient."[3] Years later, Lailā understands, that by reaching womanhood, she had entered

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1. L. Zayyāt, op. cit., p. 246. It is customary in Egypt when a marriage arrangement is made, to recite Sūra I, al-Fātiḥa by the parties concerned. See also Ṭāhā Ḥusain, Shajarat al-Bu's, pp. 14, 60.

2. See above, p. 355.

3. L. al-Zayyāt, op. cit., pp. 21-22.

"a prison" at whose door "stood her father, her brother and her mother, all keeping strict watch on the prisoner", lest she broke any "conventional standard" and brought shame upon the family.[1]

A girl never voices her opinion - if she has any - for anyway "nobody expects her to say anything".[2] Orders are given and she has to obey. To reason or to question rules is to violate the accepted code of conduct in a patriarchal family. The heavy weight of an education based on social morality to which the girl is subjected deprives her of her sense of identity.[3] Her right to self-expression and self-determination are denied her.[4] She is reduced to an ornamental sex object. Although she grows in years, her restricted and sheltered upbringing leave her with a shallow understanding of life in general. Maturity in years, is accompanied in some cases by a sense of frustration and bitterness, when the women concerned become aware of their futile existence. Suicide or going astray is their answer to a life that has been "poisoned" by the moral code imposed on them.[5]

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1. Ibid., p. 21.
2. Ibid., p. 22.
3. Ibid., p. 28.
4. Ibid., pp. 30-31.
5. Ibid., pp. 38, 273-275.

An exception to the general type of girl depicted in the novels is Amīna. Her creator portrayed her as a young, fearless creature who has the recurrent idea of breaking free from that "prison", the home in which she is brought up. He endows her with the courage to face her foster-parents and emphasize her right to act freely.[1] However, she is not oblivious of the power of conventions, but unlike Lailā in al-Bāb al-Maftūḥ, she does not submit to the social order so resignedly. She is never cowed into accepting the traditional role of woman.[2] Looking at the world around her she sees how "merciless" it is to a defenceless woman and that only through "getting a job" can she free herself and be "able to stand on her own feet."[3] Her character is strong enough to withstand the trials of the outside world and find her identity. The skill of the writer in treating his subject renders Amīna an interesting study of a Muslim girl's gradual emancipation from numerous meaningless restrictions into a mature woman who values the freedom of thought and action she has achieved. Iḥsān ʿAbd al-Quddūs himself, not restrained by taboos imposed on him by a conventional society, created in Amīna, an effective picture of an emancipated woman. Though attacked from various sections,

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1. I. ʿAbd al-Quddūs, Anā Ḥurra, p. 30.
2. Ibid., p. 30.
3. Ibid., p. 41.

male readers in particular, he stood firm by the context of his narrative. "For I decided that Anā Hurra is free in choosing its end. I cannot distort the truth."[1]

At the other end of the scale are ʿĀ'isha and Khadīja, the two daughters of ʿAbd al-Jawwād in Bain al-Qasrain. Both girls never question their father's orders, no matter how harsh they are. They accept his word as law and it does not occur to them to doubt his judgement. They see him as lord and master of the house and it is only right and proper that it should be so. They have no existence of their own, but belong to the father who has complete authority to shape their destiny.[2] They do not address him except through their mother and on very rare occasions. Likewise he addresses them through his wife.[3] When ʿĀ'isha's hand is asked in marriage, he rejects the offer for the simple reason that the prospective bridegroom has chosen her specifically and not, as is customary, sent his female relatives to ask for the hand of one of the two girls. "My daughter is not going to move into any man's house, unless I am convinced that his first motive for marriage is his sincere desire to have me as his father-in-law . . . me . . . me . . . me."[4] Later he agrees to

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1. Ibid., p. 11.

2. Maḥfūẓ, Bain al-Qasrain, pp. 179-180.

3. Ibid., p. 148.

4. Ibid., p. 180.

marry her off to the son of an old acquaintance of his. Apart from him being an "excellent catch", his vanity is satisfied as it is he whose relationship is sought.[1] Needless to say, ʿĀ'isha is not informed of the "rejection" or the "consent" until afterwards.[2]

By considering woman a helpless, inferior creature, who should be guarded and looked after, whose life should be arranged according to the pattern that fits in with the social conventions and man's designs, she is denied the development of her own tastes and ideas. If she resigns herself to her fate, she will be no different from an obedient, submissive slave, dependent on man all her life.[3] If, however, she is of a more lively nature and has an active mind, she will resort to dubious means, to counteract those heavily imposed restrictions on her freedom. This is evident in the behaviour of Jamīla and Lailā, Amīna, Nafīsa, Ḥamīda in al-Bāb al Maftūḥ, Anā Ḥurra, Bidāya wa Nihāya and Zuqāq al-Midaqq respectively.

The degree of woman's lack of freedom is best judged from society's verdict on those who infringe the conventional moral code, however slightly. Maryam in Maḥfūẓ's trilogy is such a case. Kamāl, the ten year old son of ʿAbd al-Jawwād and Maryam's

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1. Ibid., pp. 265-266.

2. Ibid., pp. 181, 272.

3. Amīna in Maḥfūẓ's trilogy is an outstanding example.

neighbour, has seen her smiling from a window, to Jolyon, the British soldier camping in front of the house. "How can she commit such a crime?" (the "crime" is not seen within a patriotic, but a moral context) "How does she confront him in such a scandalous way?" Kamāl is bombarded with questions from his incredulous family as to the truth of what he is saying. Amīna, his mother, tells him in a threatening tone that "to lie on such an issue is an unforgivable crime".[1] At the same time Yāsīn, the elder brother comments thoughtfully that, "to flirt with an Englishman is not an easy matter for a secluded girl." It indicates a "degree of corruption". Maryam is condemned. She has sullied her reputation. Later in the trilogy, she is always judged by this Jolyon episode.[2] Sanā' in al-Bāb al-Maftūḥ, is similarly condemned as a "dirty girl" by Dr. Ramzī, for having the effrontery to choose and love Maḥmūd, his fiancée's brother, and arrange their marriage, instead of complying with the traditional marriage customs,[3] notwithstanding the fact that Dr. Ramzī is considered one of the educated élite of the Country.

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1. Maḥfūẓ, Bain-al-Qaṣrain, pp. 504-507.
2. Maḥfūẓ, Qaṣr al-Shawq, p. 18.
3. L. al-Zayyāt, op. cit., p. 308.

The severity with which the middle-class girl is suppressed is brought into relief when her condition is compared with that of a girl from the upper-middle class. The above mentioned Kamāl, as a youth, is "stunned" by his friend's sister making an appearance amongst the "young men", thereby breaking all the rules he has been accustomed to so far, where "respectable" women are concerned. He suffers from the bewilderment of one saturated in the traditions of the popular Ḥusain quarter, when he sees her talking naturally to her brother's two other friends. He wonders whether her behaviour is a custom peculiar to the rich or just a "breeze" from Paris where she was brought up.[1]

Throughout the short history of the women's movement in Egypt it is evident that the degree of liberty is relative to the degree of wealth and position. "The richer the family, the greater the freedom of the girl," was the remark made recently by a woman reporter on the question of "freedom of action".[2] It is significant that the first women to discard the veil, the symbol of seclusion in 1923, were from the upper class, Hudā Sha'rāwī and her niece Sīzā Nabrāwī. This step and others

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1. Maḥfūẓ, Qaṣr al-Shawq, pp. 21-22.

2. Rose al-Yūsuf, No. 2136, 1969.

were taken by Hudā Sha'rāwī because she herself had suffered and was aware of the restrictions curtailing a woman's freedom.[1]

A wife's freedom was no less restricted by the all powerful husband. Amīna, 'Abd al-Jawād's wife in Bain al-Qaṣrain has been a "prisoner" of her house for a "quarter of century" (since the day she was married). On her rare visits to her mother, she is accompanied by her husband in a "hansom cab" for he "cannot bear an eye to fall upon her". Of the world outside the house, she knows nothing. She only sees the minarets and nearby roofs when she tends her beloved roof garden. Her long imprisonment renders her incapable and fearful of deviating, however little, from the accustomed confinement. Her very limited and restricted life has become second nature to her.[2]

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1. In a conversation with Durriyya Shafīq she related some incidents which influenced her to take up the cause of woman. She married when she was thirteen she said and her husband in conformity with the harsh traditions, deprived her of every right in life. She could not "open the windows to breathe the air", she could not play the piano, les the tunes "reach men's ears". She could not smoke a cigarette to calm her nerves, lest the smoke creeps to where the men were sitting and they might guess that "the smoke is that of the cigarette belonging to his lady wife". Durriyya Shafīq, al-Mar'a al-Miṣriyya min al-Farā'ina ilā al-Yawm, p. 137.

2. Maḥfūẓ, Bain al-Qaṣrain, p. 43. Most men of the middle class favoured complete seclusion of women on the grounds, it was contended, of the strong congenital jealousy of the Oriental male who cannot bear the thought that a stranger could look or talk to any woman of his family. See 'Abdallāh Nadīm, al-Ustādh, p. 248.

The severity of the restrictions applied to the middle class urban woman in particular are mitigated in the rural area among the villagers because of sheer necessity. The peasant woman, girl or wife, was never hidden from the menfolk. She aids them in the field work, fetches water several times a day, gathers animals' dung for fuel, and goes to the market to sell what she has raised. /Zainab (Zainab), 'Azīza (al-Ḥarām), Waṣīfa (al-Arḍ), all engage in agricultural activity to a certain extent./ She retains this apparent freedom of movement as "long as she is wise not to infringe the village traditions".[1] If she goes 'wrong' or the village community becomes suspicious of her behaviour, she is not given a chance of self-defence or self-redemption. Her lot, then, is worse than that of most of her urban counterparts. To preserve the family 'honour', her father, brother or cousin must kill her.[2] Such 'crimes of honour' are frequent. The village community condones them. Nor do the courts deal severely with the murderers, a sign of woman's worthlessness and enslavement.

Crimes of honour are not confined to rural society. Incidents of avenging the 'family honour' are found among the urban lower and middle classes as well. Nafīsa in Bidāyawa Nihāya pays with her life when her brother Ḥasanain finds out that she has been

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1. Ayrout, op. cit., p. 122.

2. Ṭāhā Ḥusain, Du'ā' al-Karawān, p. 71.

with a man.[1] ʿAbd al-Jawwād threatens his wife that "killing would not have satisfied me" had he had the slightest doubt of his daughters' moral conduct.[2] And Lailā's father makes a similar warning, if Lailā were to act in the way Sanā' did[3] (marry without the consent of her parents).

Behind man's jealous attitude towards the 'family honour' lies society's concept of 'virtue' and honour. The virtue of woman is wholly limited to the preservation of her chastity in the narrowest sense, her physical chastity. This in turn is valued beyond rational analysis, and equated with the honour of the family. The female characters in the novels, as well as in real life, protect and value their chastity, not from an innate purity, but as a valuable commodity, being thus conditioned by society. This shallow concept of 'virtue' is one of the most important factors behind a girl's anxiety, not to 'surrender' to a man except after the ma'dhūn has made the relationship safe and lawful. However, being kept under constant vigilance, restricting her physical movement, is a technical deterrent from

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1. Maḥfūẓ, Bidāya wa Nihāya, p. 376.
2. Maḥfūẓ, Bain al-Qaṣrain, pp. 179-180.
3. L. al-Zayyāt, op. cit., pp. 278-279.

forming any intimate relationship with the other sex,[1] from the start.

In Bidāya wa Nihāya Bahiyya, never shows the slightest signs of encouragement to the advances made by her fiancé Ḥasanain. Her conventional upbringing renders her shallow and distrustful of men. Not once does she deviate from her guarded behaviour. Ḥasanain, resenting her formal attitude, believes that she has planned it wisely to "guarantee him marrying her."[2]

In the same novel Nafīsa, Ḥasanain's sister, in a moment of weakness surrenders to Salmān, the grocer's son, who has promised to marry her. She is stunned by the news of his impending marriage to another girl, a match arranged by his father. His breach of promise is such a blow to her. She had pinned all her hopes on Salmān, in her despair to get a man. Her disillusionment is not just in "love", but "all life has no longer any meaning". she is "finished, finished beyond any doubt".[3] At a loss, she confronts Salmān and asks him to refuse his marriage to the other girl, because, "you have to think of me. I cannot be safe, unless you refuse".[4] Laṭīfa al-Zayyāt, a woman novelist,

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1. Ibid., pp. 53, 104, 121, 122, 131.
2. Maḥfūẓ, Bidāya wa Nihāya, pp. 252-253.
3. Ibid., p. 126
4. Ibid., p. 130.

comments on Lailā's escape from her cousin ʿIṣām's clutches, by the timely appearance of the servant, as saved from an "actual danger".[1]

The importance of a girl's physical chastity is nowhere stressed so much as in the village community. The bride's virginity is tested on the wedding night in the most primitive manner.[2] The strict adherence to and importance attached to this practice, are well presented in al-Sharqāwī's al-Arḍ. The semi-urbanised bridegroom is harshly rebuked and even slapped on the face by the father of the bride, because he refrains from applying the traditional "testing method".[3] He is ordered not to introduce such 'innovations' (bidaʿ) and carry on as "all bridegrooms do with the virtuous girls of the village". This entails the presence of a midwife and female relatives, and "a white kerchief is wrapped round his finger". The cry of the bride is "re-echoed" by the zaghārīt[4] of the women, waiting at the door, when the blood-stained kerchief is thrown in front of

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1. L. al-Zayyāt, op. cit., p. 131.
2. ʿA. Sharqāwī, al-Arḍ, p. 10.
3. D. Shafīq, op. cit., p. 43.
4. Cries of joy in the form of shrill sounds. ʿA. Sharqāwī, op. cit., p. 10.

them. The rejoicing starts, for the family's honour is safe. The men roam about the village carrying white kerchiefs stained with dark red blood and shout "here is the proof", whilst women behind them dance in circles clapping their upraised hands singing in a quick tempo:

> Tell her father to dine if he is hungry,
> The daughter of the dignified has not let us down.[1]

Not only the girl, but the wife too pays with her life if found unfaithful. The majority stay chaste "less by virtue than by the law of the village".[2] Adultery immediately leads to bloodshed. ʿAzīza in al-Ḥarām, innocent and more sinned against than sinning, is under continuous self-torment and mental anguish. She sees her 'sin' in not having had the strength to fight back and scream when Muḥammad bin Qamarain the hefty peasant, raped her.[3] She does not scream for "her mind is in a whirl". She fears "the gathering of the people . . . and the scandal". She knows that her husband is too helpless to kill her, but death is easier for her, than ʿAbdallāh (her husband) knowing and the people gossiping.[4]

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1. Ibid., p. 10.
2. Ayrout, The Egyptian Peasant, p. 121.
3. Idrīs, al-Ḥarām, p. 95.
4. Ibid., p. 93.

The hypocritical attitude of the lower middle class in particular towards the question of chastity is illustrated in Nafīsa and Iḥsān's cases respectively. Under the pretext of guarding and defending the honour of the family, Ḥasanain condemns his sister Nafīsa to an untimely death.[1] Iḥsān in al-Qāhira al-Jadīda, in a similar situation is luckier. She is married off to Maḥjūb, a university graduate.[2] The difference in the fate of both girls springs from the fact that in both cases it is not the actual loss of chastity that worries the families concerned. They are not condemned to their respective 'fate' on moral grounds, but for the self-seeking interests of those around them. Ḥasanain, in punishing his sister is getting rid of what he considers an obstacle in his own social climbing process. Iḥsān on the other hand, escapes Nafīsa's 'fate', because her seducer, is the rich and powerful Fahmī Bey who calms her parent's fears, by marrying her off to a man in need of a job, whilst he plans to continue his liaison with her.[3]

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1. Maḥfūẓ, Bidāya wa Nihāya, p. 369.
2. Maḥfūẓ, al-Qāhira al-Jadīda, pp. 120-121.
3. Ibid., p. 106.

Relationship between the sexes

With the value of the female restricted to society's superficial concept of chastity, and the ignorance displayed by the sexes of each other, as a result of the various social taboos, a healthy mixing together of the sexes is impossible. Love at its truest and fullest, embracing deep and complex emotions, cannot grow and flourish in a climate where man harbours long-established prejudices against woman, and where she is conditioned to view herself as a plaything or servant, ever subordinate to man. What is considered love in fiction as well as in fact, is in the majority of cases, no more than a certain behaviour prompted by hunger for the other sex. And the so-called 'lovers' are no more than sexually starved males, who focus their desires on a female who happens to cross their path, hence the 'love' at first sight cliché. Females, on the other hand, see in a male, the prospective husband, the lawful bedmate, and have almost nothing to offer beyond physical attraction.

A few episodes from the novels will illustrate the superficiality and sensuality of the relationship between the sexes. Ḥusain and Ḥasanain, the two brothers on catching a glimpse of their neighbour's daughter's bent back, her "protruding hips" and her legs, felt as if "hot pepper has been sprinkled unto their breasts".[1] Sometime later, Ḥasanain,

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1. Maḥfūẓ, N., Bidāya wa Nihāya, p. 54.

though he has had no occasion to add to his former 'knowledge' of the girl, speaks of his "love" for her, and interprets her entrance to the room, carrying the sugar-bowl as an indication of a similar feeling on her side. He tells his brother that they say "there is a messenger from heart to heart".[1] Prompted by his hunger for her "soft body" he thinks himself in love with her and is ready to get engaged to her, for there is "no other way of getting her. I want her."[2] During their long engagement (for he is a student), he never shows any interest in her other than a purely sensual one.[3] After two years of 'courtship' and despite all the declarations of 'love' he makes, he jilts her for no other reason than a few casual critical remarks his comrades make about her physical imperfections on seeing her with him on one occasion.[4] He falls 'out of love' as quickly as he 'fell in'.

The misinterpretation generally of what is but lust, as 'love' is vividly depicted in Dr. Ramzī's concept of love. As Lailā's fiancé, her parents have requested him to dissuade her brother Maḥmūd from marrying Sanā', the girl he loves. Deciding

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1. Ibid., p. 61.
2. Ibid., pp. 105, 152, 252, 265, 269.
3. Ibid., p. 268.
4. Ibid.,pp. 268, 323, 326.

to let Maḥmūd, benefit from his (Ramzī's) experiences he recalls an incident which happened to him when he was a young man and "deeply in love" with a neighbouring girl, and how he intended to marry her as soon as he graduated. One night while her family was away, she let him in and surrendered to him. "As I got up . . . I knew that my love for her had ended . . . ended at that moment . . .."[1] He tries to prove to Maḥmūd that "love", which he (Ramzī) equates with lust, ends "when a person gets what he wants . . .." So why is it "necessary for Maḥmūd to marry now?" he asks, implying that Maḥmūd's desire to marry Sanā' is nothing but a sexual urge which he can gratify without marrying her.[2]

The equation of 'love' with 'lust' and its 'incompatability' with marriage is a legacy from the ḥarīm system. Slave-girls were 'loved' (desired), and 'free' secluded women were married. At present, according to conventions and the moral code, female relatives and close acquaintances belong to the 'free woman' class and should not be lusted after. However, with the dropping of the veil and the lifting of the strict rules of seclusion, the problem of not desiring the only females a young man probably comes in contact with, is creating acute tensions among the

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1. L. al-Zayyāt, op. cit., p. 281.

2. Ibid., pp. 281-282.

younger generation, as is evident in 'Isām's case. He is tormented by a sense of guilt, because of his lust for his cousin's body. He is at a loss, being unable to reconcile his sexual desire with society's rules. Marriage to Lailā is impossible at the moment, for he lacks the financial means. He resolves this conflict by sleeping with the servant girl, whilst telling Lailā "that he'll never molest her, but wait until they get married."[1]

The confusion in the mind of characters between the Western concept of love, where the relationship is based on mutual mental harmony as well as physical attraction, and their desire for the female in the guise of 'love' is apparent. Even where the reader is told that the relationship goes beyond the physical attraction, he is still led to believe that the main bond is sensual, especially as the author does not sustain his claim.

'Alī Ṭāhā's well meaning aspirations, that "he wants sincerely their hearts and minds to love each other . . . and to find in her the lover, the friend and the respected equal",[2] are deprived of their significance and truthfulness, because we do not see them in action. This aspect of his character is not

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1. Ibid., p. 132.

2. Maḥfūẓ, al-Qāhira al Jadīda, p. 18.

developed so as to put his ideas to the test. Nor is the girl presented in a way to fit in with ʿAlī's wishes. One is left with the impression that the young man recites something he has learnt, without grasping the meaning involved. His utter bewilderment at Iḥsān's sudden 'coolness' and later her severance of their relationship[1] indicates his unrealistic assessment of its nature.

A similar situation arises in al-Sukkariyya between Aḥmad and Sawsan, the serious and intelligent girl from the working class. Aḥmad, who imagines himself progressive and radical, is much more interested in seeing the 'female' in Sawsan than the emancipated woman. It is the physical touch that 'stimulates' him, not the intellectual discussion.[2]

Girls of higher social standards are usually idolized from a distance. They are beyond the reach of the youth or man attracted to them. Kamāl sees ʿĀida as an ethereal being, who is unattainable, and indulges in romantic flights, that strangely enough dwell on the smallest detail of her physical appearance, "her black dreamy eyes, the well-shaped brows, the long neck and her slender figure.[3] It is significant that none of the

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1. Ibid., p. 88.

2. Maḥfūẓ, al-Sukkariyya, p. 311.

3. Maḥfūẓ, Qasr al Shawq, p. 20.

attributes mentioned by him, mark ʿĀida out as a particular individual in the flesh. She is more of an image in the mind of the 'lover'.

Woman as the 'other person' in the relationship is in the majority of cases seen through man's eyes, whether he is traditional or liberal, realistic or romantic, young or old. With the exception of Amīna in Anā Ḥurra, Ḥawwāʾin Ḥawwā'bilā Ādam, Suʿād in Duʿāʾ al-Karawān and to a certain extent, Sawsan in al-Sukkariyya, and Lailā in al-Bāb al-Maftūḥ, the female characters are uninspiring, with little to do and less to say. Their passive attitude fails to convince the reader of the actual existence of a relationship which the authors wish to convey.

Bahiyya, Ḥasanain's fiancee mentioned already, is an outstanding example of female passivity. Never once during their long engagement does she voice an independent opinion. She complies perfectly with the social conventions. It does not occur to her to deviate from or question them. She behaves in the typical fashion of the unemancipated girl to whom any man represents the male in the form of a husband. When Ḥasanain declares his "love" for her, at an opportune moment on finding her alone on the roof, she thanks him for his "feelings" and makes it clear that it is "not I who have a right to answer it".[1] He

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1. Maḥfūẓ, Bidāya wa Nihāya, p. 90.

understands that he should go to her father and ask for her hand in marriage.

Girls are conditioned to think of marriage, the moment anyone shows the slightest interest in them. Marriage is considered the ultimate goal of any relationship between the sexes, however superficial and trivial. Any advances made by the male characters, though apparently rebuffed, are secretly welcomed as an acknowledgement of their charms.

Yet when seen against the earlier attempts at 'communication', if a glance, or a smile can be termed as such, Ḥasanain and Bahiyya's 'relationship' is a step forward. Only two decades earlier when seclusion of women was still the rule (during the First World War) Fahmī "falls in love" with Maryam by just catching sight of her face across the neighbouring roof.[1] His sixteen-year-old sister 'Ā'isha, is attracted to a young officer whom she happens to have caught a glimpse of through the "narrow opening" of the wooden shutters.[2] The author sees her 'love' as a king of "appetite", more than an attachment to a particular man. If another is to take his place, "her appetite will be satisfied just as well".[3] (This holds true of almost all male and female characters in the novels.)

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1. Maḥfūẓ, Bain al-Qasrain, pp. 68-69.

2. Ibid., p. 156.

3. Ibid., p. 273.

With Sawsan in the third volume of the trilogy,[1] the relationship between her and Aḥmad can be described as a progressive step towards comradeship which may eventually blossom into 'love'. Sawsan is the new woman "a unique type among those he knows"[2] who earns her living, and makes her own decisions concerning her life. She cultivates her mind and is interested in Ahmad's intellectual achievements as well. She is the woman who no longer considers her body, as the only attraction in the market to entice man. The 'strength' of the relationship arises from the fact that Sawsan is depicted as standing on an equal footing with Aḥmad. She is able to make her own choice, not merely exist as the shadow of the male, echoing his words or saying sweet nothings.

The relationship between Amīna and ʿAbbās in Anā Ḥurra, acquires a much richer psychological and moral content than that between all the characters mentioned earlier. This is largely because of the writer's conception of the female character and role, represented in Amīna. Young, high-spirited, she has struggled hard to win freedom of action, to be able to choose or reject according to her own free will. Thus when she meets ʿAbbās, she is attracted to his ideas first, and gradually falls

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1. Maḥfūẓ, al-Sukkariyya, p. 247.

2. Ibid., p. 250.

in love with the man. Their relationship grows, involving a progress in self-knowledge and a deepening of understanding of and respect for the other sex. It reaches its climax with the fusion of body and mind, a rare phenomenon in the Egyptian novel.[1]

A somewhat similar relationship but on different lines, develops between Su'ād, the bedwin servant girl, and the young engineer whose house she keeps. From an attitude of revenge and hostility towards her 'master' for having seduced her sister, thus bringing (unknowing to him) about the sister's death at the hands of her uncle for "the sake of honour", Su'ād slowly comes to respect and love him. Their relationship involves a progressive revelation of their inner lives. Her nobility of character and purity of soul, re-educate her 'master' in his irresponsible attitude to women in general and females of humbler social origin in particular. From early attempts at seducing her, which she cleverly and delicately evades, or resists, his sexual desire for her, is gradually transformed by experience and a deeper understanding, into true love.[2]

As for relationship between man and woman in the rural community, in spite of the greater freedom of movement allowed to women, the threat of death that hangs over the head of a girl

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1. I. 'Abd-al Quddūs, Anā Ḥurra, pp. 145-176.

2. Ṭāhā Ḥusain, Du'ā' al-Karawān, pp. 150-175.

whose name is so much as whispered in gossip, makes the development of any relationship unlikely. Moreover both male and female peasants, conditioned by the hard life they lead, have their sensitivity blunted, and though they sing and speak about love, it means nothing more than sexual desire and sexual indulgence. This according to the law of the village can only be gratified in marriage. No spiritual or romantic element comes into it.[1]

It is significant that it is only where the female characters are endowed with qualities of independence of thought and action, self-assertion and free will, that the relationship between the sexes seems to develop and flourish. When the conception of the female and her role are traditional the 'love' scenes are static and lack depth. The barriers existing between the sexes are external and contrived; the dialogue, neither telling nor used dramatically to develop the characters concerned. It is obvious that the treatment of such a subject as love, with any approach to reality is difficult in an atmosphere hostile to the mingling of the sexes. Social taboos exercise their negative influence on both, male and female, as evident in most 'relationships' depicted in the novels. They render the former, in particular, unnatural and rigid, or ludicrous in his attempts to attract the other sex. Meetings, if at all, happen normally under the watchful eyes of parents. Suppressed passions cannot develop naturally in a continuously chaperoned atmosphere.

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1. ʿA. al-Sharqāwī, al-Arḍ, p. 133.

Arranged Marriages

In a recent interview held by the women's magazine Hawwā', with a number of young women in universities and commercial companies, the general complaint was the girls' lack of freedom to choose their husbands. "It is claimed,' said one, 'that we have freedom to choose our partner in life. Reality contradicts this completely . . . our freedom is false, it is abortive. All aspects of freedom which people boast about cover the same fetters which shackled the girl in the past. The result is,' she continued, 'if we stick to our principles and refuse to marry in the traditional way, our destiny will be, loneliness. We do not have the free means to choose a partner properly. And a superficial choice leads to failure, because we know very little about the man we have married."[1]

The new generation of educated women find themselves in a greater dilemma than ever before concerning their relationship with man. Frustrated at the contradictions facing them and exasperated at men's conventionality and aggressiveness, they are torn between marrying according to custom or not marrying at all, thus preserving their independence and individuality. However, this conflict,

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1. Hawwā' No. 588, 30 December 1967. The Muslim Law gives the woman the right to choose her marriage partner, in the sense that she has to give her written consent in order that the marriage contract be valid. This concept of "choice" is well illustrated in Haykal's Zainab, pp. 125, 127-128.

affects only a minority among the more prosperous middle classes. For the rest, arranged marriages is the practice, and a girl is compelled in most cases to comply with the choice of her parents.[1] To oppose, or show the slightest sign of disagreement, or refusal is considered the height of disrespect and according to region and class, may be damaging to the girl's reputation.[2] For it will be presumed by the families concerned, that her objection to the match implies an inclination to someone else. This might place her in a dangerous position,[3] particularly in the rural area.[4]

Amīna, is a unique case, among the female characters, in that she has the courage to break her engagement to Aḥmad, because she soon finds out that the man to whom she became engaged in the traditional way, is conventionally minded and that living with him later, would mean "exchanging one prison with another".[5]

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1. The Ḥanafī school of law allows a Muslim woman to make her marriage contract on her own, on condition that she chooses a husband of her equal in social standing. The other schools require that she be contracted in marriage by her guardian. See J.N.D. Anderson, Islamic Law in the Modern World, (London 1959) pp. 43-44, 47.

2. L. al-Zayyāt, op. cit., p. 245.

3. Ibid., p. 279.

4. Ḥ. Haykal, Zainab, p. 127; ʿA.R. al-Sharqāwī, al-Arḍ, p. 119.

5. I. ʿAbd al-Quddūs, Anā Ḥurra, p. 95.

Lailā, on the other hand, is too timid and observant of the social rules. She finds great difficulty in overcoming her inhibitions, and facing reality. Had it not been for external forces, it would be doubtful whether she could have found the courage to break her engagement to Dr. Ramzī.[1] Jamīla, her cousin, submits in the end to her mother's incessant persuasion, and accepts the arranged match without having even seen her future 'husband'. As for him, any female will do as long as she comes from a fairly good family and has fair skin.[2]

Though village life is conducive to contact between the sexes, and mutual attraction might ensue, submission to the father's choice is the common practice, however painful.[3] Zainab in the novel of that same title, has to marry Hasan, though in love with Ibrāhīm.[4] Waṣīfa in al-Arḍ, being the belle of the village has many admirers, but keeps them all at bay in conformity with the social custom, awaiting the one her father will choose for her.[5]

Not that an arranged marriage dissatisfied all girls.

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1. L. al-Zayyāt, op. cit., p. 287, 352.

2. Ibid., p. 58.

3. A strict code of behaviour is followed in Egyptian villages. For details see Ḥāmid ʿAmmār, Growing Up in an Egyptian Village (London, 1954), pp. 50-53.

4. Ḥ. Haykal, Zainab, pp. 125-126.

5. ʿA.R. al-Sharqāwī, al-Arḍ, pp. 42, 87.

Conditioned for centuries to be regarded as a mere 'chattel' with no will or opinion of her own, many a girl welcomed the 'announcement' of a suitor for the sake of marriage alone. We are told in Bain al Qaṣrain that ʿĀ'isha received the good news - the arrangement for her marriage to a Turkish Lady's son - with the "joy worthy of a girl who looks forward to marriage from early youth".[1] The author explains her gladness "although the bridegroom is unknown to her" to her "thirsty emotions" which see in him (as a male) a magnet towards whom they can turn their longing.[2] ʿĀ'isha's unquestioning happy attitude is in keeping with the social framework of the second decade of the twentieth century, where seclusion is still strictly imposed and woman in general unaware of her rights. Not so is a girl's passive or apathetic attitude in present day's society. ʿAdīla, in al-Bāb al-Maftūḥ, brushes aside her friends' argument that love should be the basis of marriage, not parental choice or society's traditions, and states emphatically that marriage is "a fact not fiction".[3]

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1. Maḥfūẓ, Bain al-Qaṣrain, p. 272.

2. Ibid., p. 273.

3. L. al-Zayyāt, al-Bāb al-Maftūḥ, p. 68. (The idea stressed here is within the general concept of marriage as a business rather than an emotional involvement.)

When the choice of a partner is made by the individuals concerned, the resentment of the parents is great. They protest strongly against any independent action taken by their sons, let alone their daughters.[1] In both cases, involving a free choice, the novelists present the man's family reaction and not the girl's. Aḥmad finds it hard to convince his parents, his domineering and conventionally minded mother in particular, of his right to choose his prospective bride, as he is a fully grown-up person. She does not agree with her unruly son's ideas and reminds him sarcastically that "marriage has its conditions" which he for one, she claims is unable to fulfil, as he lacks "sound judgement" to make a proper choice.[2]

Mahmūd in al-Bāb al-Maftūḥ encounters greater resistance in the shape of his father, for not adhering to the accepted social custom. His father does not refrain from disowning him and attributing to the girl he has chosen infamous qualities, when he finds out that his son is adamant.[3]

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1. "Under the influence of 'modern' Western ideas, friction may arise between father and son . . . the young man increasingly becomes aware of his father's restricting supervision and resents his dependence and the restraint on his freedom of action and decision in his work and private life. The older man finds it difficult to relinquish the customary domination over his son, even though in theory he may realise that it is outmoded and that 'modern' life and 'modern' youth demand fewer restrictions and more ceding of responsibility. I. Lichtenstädter, "An Arab Egyptian Family". Middle East Journal, Autumn 1952, p. 385. Though these comments have been made on family life in an Egyptian village, similar behaviour is found among middle and lower middle class families in urban centres.

2. Maḥfūẓ, al-Sukkarriyya, pp. 318-319.

3. L. al-Zayyāt, op. cit., pp. 277-280.

There is ample evidence that these arranged marriages are made on a commercial basis. Marriage is largely a matter of choosing the best available economic supporter. Many a young man is dismissed on the grounds of his insufficient means. He is not worth considering as a husband for the daughter. A custom peculiar to Egypt, especially its middle class, is that whereas the bridegroom pays the 'brideprice' mahr, the girl has to furnish the new house or flat. This entails a cumbersome burden on the father of the bride, inducing him to be more keen than ever on securing the 'right' husband for her.[1]

A girl whose father has not the means to provide her with the required furniture, or who does not work and earn some money, inevitably lessens her chances of marriage. Nafīsa's future is considered hopeless. Her father died leaving the family to exist on a meagre pension. Jamīla's mother sees 'Alī Bey as a "catch" which does not befall a girl twice. He is ready not only to pay £300 as mahr but "furnish the whole house too, inclusive of the kitchen with the refrigerator and gas cooker".[2] Aḥmad 'Abd al-

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1. Maḥfūẓ, Bidāya wa Nihāya, pp. 49, 99; The mahr is considered an essential part of the marriage contract and in accordance with the traditions and the demands of the Qur'ān (Sura IV.24 and Sura IV.3). In settling the amount of the mahr, haggling frequently takes place (See Yawmiyyāt Nā'ib, pp. 34-36 and Zainab, p. 125) as in any business transaction. Among the well-to-do the 'brideprices' rise to a high level befitting the wealth and family of the bride.

2. L. al-Zayyāt, op. cit., p. 59.

Jawwad , does not reject Khalīl, Mrs. Shawkat's son, as the future husband for his daughter, though he did so with the young officer before him. For Khalīl is "a catch with the true meaning of the word". He has an income of no less than £30 a month, (a considerable amount in 1917) and is young. His sparse education, his idleness, as is the case with most notables, in no way detract from his suitability.[1]

At the upper social level, marriage is conducted on the basis of a mutual increase in the capital and property of the two people concerned.[2] The parents "cook the meal together", comments Naẓīm Pasha on the successful arrangement he made of the marriage of his son to an heiress.[3] "He gains an estate . . ." reflects Hawwā' dejectedly, whilst she, only a teacher, can offer him "nothing but love".[4]

ʿĀida's father in Innī Raḥīla, rejects her cousin, Aḥmad, a fine young man, because his monthly salary of £25 is not enough and his "prospects are limited".[5] He forces her to marry the

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1. Maḥfūẓ, Bain al-Qaṣrain, p. 265.

2. Marriage within the families of large landowners was a frequent occurrence before the change of régime (1952). For examples see Baer, Population and Society, p. 69.

3. Ṭ. Lāshīn, op. cit., p. 110.

4. Ibid., p. 127. Marriage between landowners made it possible to unite "stretches of landed property which would otherwise have broken up because of divided inheritances". Baer, Population and Society, p. 69.

5. Y. al-Sibāʿī, Innī Rāḥila, pp. 240-241.

"good for nothing"[1] dandy, son of Zakī Pasha, because of his wealth and "promising future". He assures his daughter that the young man will follow in his father's footsteps, "for all high posts are almost hereditary".[2]

For the sake of appearances and respectability, girls are given to the highest bidder, and parents however much they like a certain girl or man do not allow their sentiments to interfere with their interests in shaping the future of their children. Lailā and ʿIṣām, who are related, know that their respective families like them very much, but they realize that both their parents are going to oppose their marriage. They have other arrangements in store for each of them, based on material considerations and social aspirations.[3]

Marriages are often arranged through matchmakers, either employed by the parents themselves, or by the female contemplating matrimony. In the case of the latter, it is usually a mature woman either divorced or a widow. Ḥamīda's mother in Zuqāq al-Midaqq uses her worldly wisdom and feminine wiles to present each of her clients to his or her opposite in the most favourable

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1. Ibid., p. 222.
2. Ibid., pp. 220, 240.
3. L. al-Zayyāt, op. cit., p. 117.

light.[1] However, woman, in the role of a matchmaker, rarely appears in the novels studied.

In accordance with the custom of arranged marriages, girls have to be presented to "prospective buyers" in the most favourable light, to fetch a "high price" in the "marriage market".[2] In a society whose concept of marriage is no more than that of a legal sexual tie between man and woman, the emphasis is naturally on the physical attributes of the "future bride". A poignant, realistic account made by young Laila sums up a girl's lot in the present Egyptian urban society in which she lives. "When a girl is born, they smile resignedly, when she grows up, they imprison her and train her for the . . . art of life! How to smile, how to bow, how to perfume herself, how to be delicate, . . . how to lie and wear a 'corset' that tightens her waist and lifts her breasts, so that her price goes up in the market. She gets married . . . to whom? Anyone. 'Nothing disgraces man but his pockets', (is the common evaluation of a suitor), she wears the white veil and moves to her husband's house . . .. Everything is easy, and simple . . . but she has to be very careful, she must not feel, she must not think, she must not love . . . else she'll be killed."[3]

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1. N. Maḥfūẓ, Zuqāq al-Midaqq, pp. 28-29.

2. L. Zayyāt, op. cit., p. 36.

3. Ibid., pp. 36-37.

Since a healthy relationship with a 'respectable' girl is unattainable, men sought an outlet for their sexual desires in the world of the 'singing and dancing girls' (al-ʿawālim),[1] the prostitutes, the servants,[2] and various girls from among the poor.[3] Married men, patronized the ʿawālim and frequented them. There they indulged in 'pleasures' from which they refrained in their own homes, some in keeping with the traditional view which separated the function of a wife from that of a 'mistress', whilst others could not obtain any satisfactory pleasures in their homes because of the whole social milieu.

The right of a husband or father to prohibit any encounter between the women belonging to him and the outside world is not questioned, nor is his right to enjoy himself outside the house questioned either. ʿAbd al-Jawwād, expects his wife, Amīna, to be ever ready to serve him, no matter how late he returns from his nightly rendezvous.[4] While with her, he is anxious to assume the role of the "strict" and "dignified" husband. In the company of the ʿālima, her singing girls, and his boon companions, he is

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1. Maḥfūẓ, Bain al-Qaṣrain, Qaṣr al-Shawq. They are female professional singers, often very highly paid. Many of an inferior class sometimes dance in an all women's gathering or formerly in the ḥarīm. On the ʿawālim in the nineteenth century see E.W. Lane, Manners and Customs, pp. 361-362.

2. L. al-Zayyāt, op. cit., p. 142.

3. Maḥfūẓ, al-Qāhira al-Jadīda, p. 28.

4. Id. Bain al-Qaṣrain, p. 9.

transformed into 'Abd al-Jawwād the 'womanizer' (zīr nisā') and slave of drink. In the words of his one-time mistress, the ʿālima Zubaida, "You are a man whose appearance indicates piety, and whose inner self is frivolous and lascivious".[1]

What men expected to find in the world of the 'attainable' women is represented by 'Abd al-Jawwād's behaviour and attitude. On coming across Zubaida one day, he congratulates himself on the "delightful pleasures" he is going to expect that night and other nights[2]. "She is appetizing . . . her folds of flesh and fat are liable to keep a cold person warm in the midst of winter".[3] He responds with "ecstasy and enthusiasm" whenever the call for sensual gratification is in sight. He goes to her party to 'misbehave'.[4] So great is the duality in his personality that his family is utterly ignorant of the man "as he lives among the people".[5] When his eldest son Yāsīn, who takes after his father, learns from Zannūba, his 'woman' on such a night of pleasure, the name of the 'lover' of the singer Zubaida, he is transfixed. "His father? The stern, mighty, awesome, pious and devout Aḥmad 'Abd al-Jawwād? He who frightens those around him to death? This

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1. Ibid., p. 106.
2. Ibid., p. 112.
3. Ibid., p. 101.
4. Ibid., p. 113.
5. Ibid., p. 44.

same man, is playing the tambourine . . . cracking jokes and killing those around him with laughter! How is it possible to believe what he heard? There can be no link between his father and that lover and player of the tambourine."[1]

Years later, when no longer, in the energy and vigour of their prime, ʿAbd al-Jawwād, and his companions have not lost their zest for 'sensual pleasures'. The scene is no longer a house but a houseboat rented by one of the friends who devotes it to "pleasure parties", indulging as was their habit, in drink, song and sex.[2]

The frequenting of these houses by ʿAbd al-Jawwād and his friends, representing the married men from the middle class, was in imitation of the practices of the upper class who sought pleasure outside the family sphere ever since slave girls 'invaded' Muslim society.

Apart from the ʿawālim and professional prostitutes, servant girls were considered available and easy game for the suppressed and dissatisfied male. Yāsīn, a minor clerk at a school, can ill-afford the lavish world of the female singers his father is accustomed to. Driven by his hunger for the female he attempts to rape the forty year old servant woman at his father's house, while she is asleep.[3]

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1. Ibid., p. 284.

2. Id., Qasr al-Shawq, pp. 85-95.

3. Maḥfūẓ, Bain al-Qasrain, p. 319.

Jamīla and her mother condone ʿIṣām's "relationship" with the servant girl. Her callous remark that "every young man of that age and not married, necessarily does so, else he is not a man"[1] shocks her sensitive and innocent cousin, Lailā. This inconsiderate attitude towards servant girls is reflected too in Ṭāhā Ḥusain's Duʿāʾ al-Karawān. Hanādī is the last of her employer's victims. She pays with her life for having allowed her master to seduce her.[2]

In al-Qāhira al-Jadīda, it is evident that Maḥjūb, the student, resorts to the poor "cigarette tips collector" to satisfy his sexual urge. She costs him but "three piastres", an amount his hard hit pocket is able to afford at the time.[3]

Status of Wife

Though marriage was and is the eventual destiny of the greater number of women in the society depicted, it is regrettable that no attempt has been made at a serious analysis of the status of the married woman. The traditional Islamic view of a wife is the one reflected in the novels. She is presented as the childbearer, cook and housekeeper. Her subordinate

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1. L. al-Zayyāt, op. cit., p. 142.
2. Ṭ. Ḥusain, Duʿāʾ al-Karawān, p. 71.
3. Maḥfūẓ, al-Qāhira al-Jadīda, p. 28.

position and her subjection to man are still the widely accepted bases upon which the marriage relationship is based. The theory of 'Evolution' and the various sociological treatises have no discernible effect on the Egyptian novelist's outlook and way of thinking, concerning this question, as they most emphatically had on their European counterparts almost a century ago.[1]

Amīna, in Bain al-Qaṣrain, is an outstanding example of the traditional concept of a good wife. She is dutiful and obedient, has no opinion of her own, but echoes that of her husband. When, after her first year of marriage, she objects politely to her husband's continuous "late nights", she is held by the ear and told firmly that, "I am the man, the one who gives the orders and who forbids. I will not accept any remark about my behaviour. You have only to obey. So, beware of inducing me to teach you manners."[2] The tyrannical behaviour of her husband, leads timid Amīna to put up with almost anything, even the companionship of the ʿifrīts who she believes haunt the empty house, and frighten her to death in her nightly vigilance, awaiting the return of

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1. The new sociological thinking which resulted from the impact of the theory of evolution; the influence of men like John Stuart Mill, especially his treatise on The Subjection of Women (1869) made possible honest thinking and free discussion and a far more daring analysis of the status of women within marriage than anything which had been attempted previously. This is evident in the novels of George Eliot, Samuel Butler (The Way of All Flesh in particular), George Gissing and Émile Zola.

2. Maḥfūẓ, Bain al-Qaṣrain, pp. 8-9.

her husband.[1] She obeys him "unconditionally" and gets so accustomed to her servile position, that she explains his 'nightly escapades' and his despotism as attributes of real manhood. She never complains about his oppression. Her submission reaches its climax, when her husband orders her out of the house after twenty-five years of "blind obedience". She is punished for having gone out on a nearby visit accompanied by her youngest son, to the Husain. mosque, a place she had longed to see for over a quarter of a century.[2]

Though Amīna is an extreme case, she is not an exceptional one. She represents a fair section of the women of the middle and lower middle classes who were conditioned from childhood to consider a husband, the lord and master, whose caprices and unfaithfulness are to be endured silently.[3]

Man's concept of marriage as reflected in the novels, is to a large extent and especially among the lower middle and middle classes, conventional and governed by his belief in the inequality of the sexes. Consequently, he marries a woman not to

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1. Ibid., p. 8.

2. Ibid., p. 234.

3. ʿAbdallāh Nadīm wrote in al-Ustādh at the end of the nineteenth century that "man is the glory of woman and the protector of her honour . . . without him, woman is worth neither silver nor copper". (p. 227) He rules that even if the husband gambles, drinks, commits adultery the wife has only the right to dissuade him by way of entreaty and request. al-Ustādh, pp. 229-231. Nadīm's views on women were held by the majority of his compatriots and continued well into the twentieth century. cf. Ṭāhā Ḥusain, Shajarat al-Bu's, pp. 96-97.

"share his life" but "to serve him" as in the case of Fikrī Afandī in al-Ḥarām: a woman who is a "good cook" and from whom the knowledge of the world outside the housedoor, full of evil and sin, is best kept away.[1]

The question of marriage is discussed in considerable detail in Zainab. The influence of the Western concept of marriage on the author is evident in the statements made by his characters. Ḥasanain, a friend of Ḥāmid, deplores the existing drab family life where there is "no communication between husband and wife except that which the ḥadīth ordains 'marry and procreate'." He stresses the importance of compatibility and love between the sexes as a basis for a successful marriage.[2]

The 'law of servitude' in marriage is illustrated in the ṭitle given by the wife to her husband. Amīna never addresses her husband by his name. When referring to him or talking to him he is always 'the master' or 'my master'.[3] And Fikrī Afandī's wife despite twenty years of marriage, dares not call her husband anything but "Fikrī Afandī". In their most relaxed moments she addresses him as Abū Ṣafwat [4](Ṣafwat being their eldest son).

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1. Y. Idrīs, al-Ḥarām, p. 67.
2. Ḥ. Haykal, Zainab, pp. 133-137.
3. Maḥfūẓ, Bain al-Qaṣrain, pp. 12, 221, 178.
4. Y. Idrīs, op. cit., pp. 72-73.

If a woman deviates from the general pattern of what a wife should be, shows discontent with her lot or disobeys her husband, then he is within his lawful rights to beat her.[1] In keeping with this legalized treatment, another and most severe and humiliating custom is practised in Egypt, namely the bait al-ṭāʿa (house of obedience), whereby a husband may call police assistance to bring back his disobedient wife. She is then imprisoned in a cell by force, with the barest of requisites and stays there until "she comes to her senses".[2] This 'degrading' custom has, strangely enough, not invited any attack from the male novelists. There is a passing reference to it in Bain al-Qasrain. When Yāsīn learns that his wife Zainab has left him, on account of his 'wantonness', and returned to her father's house, asking for a divorce, his vanity as the "master" receives a severe blow. His wife's "wayward" behaviour has to be punished. He argues with his

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1. Qur'ān, Sūra 4, 34. "Those whose perverseness you fear, admonish them, do not sleep with them and beat them." Under the Sharīʿa, a husband has the right "to submit his wife to mild corporal punishment in certain circumstances". J.N.D. Anderson, "Law Reform in Egypt", in Political and Social Change in Modern Egypt, ed. P.M. Holt, p. 219.

2. The proposed new Egyptian law of personal status, considered the abolition of this custom. Nothing has come of it since 1960. Baer, Population and Society, p. 35; also Durriyya Shafīq; al-Marʿa al-Miṣriyya, pp. 43-44; al-Ahrām, 3 August 1960. A vivid description is given by Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī in Khalīhā ʿAlā Allāh, pp. 229-230. If for any reason woman leaves the matrimonial home and refuses to return, the law forces her back. In a paper by Lailā S. al-Ḥamāmṣy, The Role of Women in the Development of Egypt, Social Research Centre, A.U.C. (1958), p.3.

father that there is a way in which one treats a perverse wife besides divorcing her. He can imprison her in bait al-tā'a.[1]

Of the peasant woman as a wife, little is recorded in the novels. Her status, however, can be gleaned from the general atmosphere they reflect and the attitude of the village community towards both sexes. Her main characteristic is not unlike that of her urban sister. She is submissive and passive, attentive to the needs of her husband,[2] aids him in the field when necessary, and busies herself at 'home' milking, baking, tending the buffalo, and looking after the poultry, if any.[3] A peasant's wife is freer than a townswoman or the wife of a rural middle class person. Her husband does not interfere with her goings and coming so long as she does not break the set conventions as mentioned earlier. She believes that her function as a wife, is to be a kind of extinguisher of her husband's lust and a producer of children. She does not take the initiative, but is conditioned to comply with her husband's wishes. Even if she is considered a good manager of the house, she must never display her authority or interrupt her husband while he is talking. The way she is addressed is indicative of the position she occupies. Her identity as an 'individual' is lost. She is not called by her name, but

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1. Maḥfūẓ, Bain al-Qaṣrain, p. 470.

2. Y. Idrīs, al-Ḥarām, pp. 87-88.

3. 'A.R. al-Sharqāwī, al-Arḍ, pp. 176, 234 and passim.

addressed either as (woman) Ya mara, or Ya umm ʿAbd al-Hādī (the mother of ʿA. al-Hādī, their son),[1] for example .

To a peasant, because of his difficult economic position, his wife is of less value than his buffalo, though she is regarded a labour force. When Masʿūd Abū Qāsim, in al-Arḍ learns that his buffalo has slipped into the "well" he is beside himself with grief. He keeps moving his eyes between his wife and the men who have hurried to the aid of the buffalo, and screams, "the buffalo is lost . . . you woman have lost her . . . I wish it were you who fell in the well . . .. How can I replace a buffalo. Oh! brethren . . .."[2]

The picture differs when dealing with women of the upper class. They show on the whole, within their confined sphere, a more masterful attitude and expect their husbands to treat them courteously. This is most obvious when the wife is of a higher social status than her husband.

Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm in disclosing Muḥsin's feelings towards his parents, throws light on the haughty behaviour of Muḥsin's Turkish mother, towards his Egyptian father. She is criticising her son's carelessness in matters of dress and wonders after whom he is

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1. Ibid., p. 117.

2. Ibid., p. 182. Ayrout relates a similar incident, where the wife is far less worried about the fate of her husband who has been impressed to fight the flood, than about the loss of her buffalo. Ayrout, The Egyptian Peasant, p. 122.

taking. When his father denies that he has set any example for the boy's "unconcern", she turns towards him and says sarcastically: "Since when you peasant ʿumda . . .. Do you deny that it was I who civilized you and taught you style?" The husband retreats, acknowledging his wife's superiority for "you are a Turk, daughter of Turks".[1]

A similar attitude is reflected in Farīda Hānim's behaviour towards her husband Naẓīm Pasha, when he informs her of the arrangement he made for their son's marriage. She objects to it, as it militates against her own plans, and shows her dissatisfaction and anger. To her husband's assertion of his mastery in the house, she simply shrugs her shoulders.[2] The author's comment on this scene, that times have changed and woman is no longer the "docile, submissive creature who stands by her husband in right and wrong"[3] requires qualification. It is women from the upper class who acted in the way he depicted and not women in general.

The relationship of husband and wife rarely develops into a solid bond, despite the advent of children.[4] Because it is built upon the basis of female inferiority, it suffers from a lack

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1. T. al-Ḥakīm, ʿAudat al-Rūḥ, Part II, pp. 11-12.

2. Ṭ. Lāshīn, Hawwā'bilā Ādam, p. 99.

3. Ibid., p. 100.

4. H. Haykal, Zainab, pp. 133-134. Maḥfūẓ, Bain al-Qaṣrain, pp. 12-13, 26 and passim.

of balance. A wife's condition is greatly influenced by the marriage and divorce laws which bear heavily upon her. "In everyday life the continual threat of divorce is a depressing and debasing part of the Muslim woman's existence".[1] The fact that the Qur'ān allows polygamy[2], and gives man the privilege of divorcing his wife without demanding any justification for such an act,[3] renders a wife's position very insecure and subjects her to constant psychological stress.[4]

A most expressive view of a wife's position and the harmful effect of the marriage and divorce laws on her is given by Ṭāhā Ḥusain in Shajarat al-Bu's. Zubaida overhears her husband Salīm telling Khālid that "most inhabitants of hell are women". Later she points out to him with sarcasm that whatever men do they are always free from blame. If they ill-use their wives, "hang the sharp sword of divorce over their heads", and aim the "spear of marriage to a second wife" at the depths of their hearts, thereby upsetting their whole life and driving them to "treachery,

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1. Baer, Population and Society, p. 36.

2. Qur'ān, Sūra IV[3].

3. Ibid., Sūra II[227]. IV[34]. A man may divorce his wife at will simply by uttering the divorce formula. Attempts have been made to restrict by legislation a husband's unlimited right to divorce his wife. Law No. 25 of 1929 provided that most forms of repudiation which the husband "did not really intend to be effective were henceforth deemed not to end the marriage relationship". J.N.D. Anderson, "Law Reform in Egypt", 1850-1950, op. cit., p. 225.

4. Divorce is "undoubtedly one of Egypt's major social ills". Egypt's divorce rate is among the highest in the world, 30 per 100 marriages. C. Issawi, Egypt at Mid-Century, p. 70.

deceit and hypocrisy" it will not affect them (men). For "you are enjoying the rights God has granted you".[1] Throughout, Zubaida's words reflect the author's concern and dissatisfaction with the legal status of woman.

Amīna, in spite of her twenty-five years of marriage to ʿAbd al-Jawwād in which she was a model of a self-denying, patient wife, and the mother of five children she bore him, is nonetheless uncertain of her future. Her husband has 'expelled' her from the house. She is not sure whether her punishment is for a limited period or whether he is going to repudiate her for good. The thought keeps recurring while she awaits the "verdict" and worries her tremendously.[2]

Ḥawwāʾ's grandmother represents a typical victim of man's irresponsible attitude towards the marriage bond and his utilization of the divorce law to serve his purpose. Keeping her at home, caring neither for her "beauty nor loyalty", he enjoys himself drinking and whiling away his time in the company of wealthy men till the late hours of the night. On striking a friendship with one of the rich, he is offered the daughter in marriage, on condition he divorces his wife. He does so, without any qualms.[3] The sufferings ensuing from the divorce law extend over all classes of society. The injury is greatest among the lower middle

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1. Ṭāhā Ḥusain, Shajarat al-Bu's, pp. 97-100.
2. Maḥfūẓ, Bain al-Qaṣrain, p. 150.
3. Ṭ. Lāshīn, op. cit., p. 32.

and lower classes, as in the majority of cases they are wholly dependent on their husbands for their subsistence.[1]

Whereas a man has the privilege to divorce his wife at "will or caprice"[2] no such liberty is accorded to the wife.[3] If for some reason she can no longer endure her husband and wishes to leave him, she cannot acquire her freedom except with the greatest difficulty and/or with the maximum of sacrifice of her rights (foregoing mu'akhkhar /al-ṣadāq (the remaining portion of the mahr), the furniture if she brought any and, most painful of all, her children).[4]

In the case of Zainab, Yāsīn's wife, had it not been for Muḥammad 'Iffat, her father, who demanded most vehemently her

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1. See Baer, Population and Society, p. 36. "A man's right . . . to divorce his wife at a moment's notice . . . is a cause of insecurity and actual misery to many women - especially among the poorer classes." Lailā al-Ḥamāmṣy, "The Role of Women in the Development of Egypt" (a paper) Social Research Centre, A.U.C. p. 4.

2. R. Levy, The Social Structure of Islam (Cambridge, 1969) p. 121.

3. Injī Aflāṭūn in Naḥnu al-Nisā' al-Miṣriyyāt deplores inequality in legal rights in the question of divorce. I. Aflāṭūn, Naḥnu al-Nisā' al-Miṣriyyāt (Cairo, n.d.); p.42. "Once married", writes Lailā al-Ḥamāmṣy, the woman has no right to separation or divorce except with the husband's consent or court ruling. The court may grant a woman divorce in such cases as when the husband does not provide for her adequately over a period of time . . . when he has used physical violence and caused her bodily injury, if he should prove impotent." A woman may obtain the right to divorce her husband at will if this right is incorporated in the marriage contract. L. al-Ḥamāmṣy op. cit., p. 3. See also, J.N.D. Anderson, "Law Reform in Egypt: 1850-1950" op. cit., p. 225.

4. From interviews and conversation with the women, rural and urban, which the present writer held in 1965. If a woman wishes to divorce and there is no legally acceptable reason for divorce and her husband refuses to divorce her, she remains legally bound to him and he "exercises over her the right to 'obedience'". L. al-Ḥamāmṣy op. cit., p. 3.

divorce from his friend ʿAbd al-Jawwād and Yāsīn's father on the grounds of the latter's despicable behaviour and her long suffering, ʿAbd al-Jawwād and Yāsīn would never have agreed. For the former's indignation is not at the loss of his daughter-in-law or his son's misconduct, nor is Yāsīn's grievance the absence of his wife. The father resents his son's unmanliness in not being able to "curb a wild woman". Yāsīn on the other hand, is shocked by Zainab's effrontery in seeking a divorce. "Who is the man and who the woman?" he wonders. "It is not strange for a human being to discard a shoe (wife), . . . but for a shoe to discard its owner!!"[1]

Besides the evils occasioned by the divorce law, the fact that the marriage law permits plurality of wives only adds to a wife's insecurity.[2] Economic conditions and education have lessened the practice of polygamy to a certain degree, nevertheless, the very existence of the law is a reminder to the wife of her unstable position.[3]

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1. Maḥfūẓ, Bain al-Qaṣrain, p. 470.

2. The privileges which the law gives exclusively to the men tend to give women a low "bargaining position" in intra-family relations, which in turn leads to women's submissiveness and invites exploitation and tyranny on the part of irresponsible men. L. Ḥamāmṣy, op. cit., p. 4.

3. At the turn of the century and the first decades of the twentieth century polygamy was common not only among the wealthy but the lower classes as well. See F. Schwally, Beiträge zur Kenntnis des Lebens der Mohammedanischen Städter, Fellachen und Beduinen in Heutigen Ägypten (Heidelberg, 1912) pp. 16-17, 20, 34. In 1927 the Cabinet approved draft legislation to restrict polygamy. King Fu'ād refused to approve the recommendations. According to the new proposal for a law of personal status (1960), marriage to a second wife will be considered damaging to the first wife and may serve as grounds for divorce. See Baer, Population and Society, pp. 55-56; also J.N.D. Anderson, "Recent Developments in Sharīʿa Law", Muslim World, 1951, pp. 113-126, 271-288.

However the theme of polygamy, is barely touched upon in the novels with the exception of Ṭāhā Ḥusain in Shajarat al-Bu's.[1] It is difficult to assess society's attitude on such a vital matter which influences the every day life of a married woman from the novels, whether the narrative is set in the city or the countryside. The general impression one gets is that monogamy is preferred in the middle classes, as most authors depict marriage to one woman only.[2]

A casual reference to plurality of wives is to be found in Khān al-Khalīlī. The calligrapher Nūnū, is apparently well pleased with himself for having four wives and a mistress. He considers himself to be applying the law of God. When the astonished Aḥmad ʿĀkif inquires as to his reasons for marrying four especially as his financial situation can scarcely afford it, he answers good humouredly, that as a calligrapher he views women as he views the various kinds of script. One represents the "naskh", the other "riqʿa", a third "thuluth" and the fourth "fārisī", and not one can take the place of the other. He ends his businesslike survey of women with the declaration that "it is only God in whose oneness he believes".[3]

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1. Ṭāhā Ḥusain, Shajarat al-Bu's, pp. 77, 97, 106-110.

2. This is confirmed by Issawi and Miss al-Hamāmṣy. The latter wrote in 1958 that among "the educated classes and the majority of uneducated, monogamy is the rule". op. cit., p. 3; Issawi, Egypt at Mid-Century, p. 70.

3. Maḥfūẓ, Khān al-Khalīlī, p. 47.

It is a man's view and reflects lower class attitude to woman. One regrets that except for Zubaida in Shajarat al-Bu's, the subject is not approached from the feminine point of view.[1] One would have gained insight into the anxiety, the stress, the jealousy and the humiliation which is inflicted on woman in such a situation. Woman's suffering is brushed aside with a "shrug of the shoulders" as "non-existent" and the result of "man's weakness". To man, wives are content so long as the husband imposes his "manhood"[2] on them.

Another casual reference in keeping with lower class man's view of polygamy is made in Ahlan wa Sahlan. Sharāra, a Jack of all trade, in a conversation with 'Abd al-Jalīl, the 'umda's companion, remarks that he is married to two women, "one in Cairo, the other in Luxor". One, as he puts it "at the beginning of the road" the other "at the end". "My life is a continuous travel between these two stations," he comments. "This is happiness in my opinion . . .. Were God a little more generous, I would have married a third station in the middle of the road . . .. The journey from Cairo to Luxor is long . . .. How I wish I could

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1. A number of women novelists (not discussed in this study for reasons given in the introduction) broached problems connected with marriage and divorce. But foremost, they are occupied with the question of love and whether it should precede or follow marriage.

2. Maḥfūẓ, op. cit., p. 48

divide it into two. May God help me, so that I'll be able to marry the third, and relax."[1]

General Comment

The significant conclusion one draws from the image of woman as presented by the novelists is that changes in her status during the first six decades of the twentieth century are almost negligible. Her gradual emergence from a secluded life, her entering the educational and later in some cases, the occupational field have not influenced man's deeply rooted concept of her as an inferior being, fit for reproduction and the pleasure of the male. This is evident, in the absence of a really emancipated character. Amīna in Anā Ḥurra is the nearest a female character gets to independence of thought and freedom of action. Yet even she, has been endowed with the traditional physical attributes[2] in case her high spirits and strength of character render her less attractive to the opposite sex, whose interest generally, does not go beyond the 'body'. Since female characters are on the whole presented in their 'love' relationship, emphasis is mainly on their physical appearance. The picture of the desirable woman that emerges from the novel is confined to specific physical assets.

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1. Ḥ. Mu'nis, Ahlan wa Sahlan, pp. 111-112.

2. I. ʿAbd al-Quddūs, Anā Ḥurra, p. 14.

Highest on the list are the "firm breasts", the "round belly", the "projecting buttocks" that "drive a man out of his senses"[1], the "long jet black hair" or its "golden" counterpart, full "rosy" or "fiery" lips, a moon-like face and a "fair complexion". If the female happens to be a brunette, then an additional asset of liveliness and coquetry, are bestowed on her, to compensate for her less attractive colour. The concept of a 'beautiful woman' on the whole is that of a female with a 'full soft body'. Men of the older generation see beauty in a fat woman whose "flesh falls layer upon layer",[1] or according to the ʿumda of Kafr Suhail one who is like "a packet of butter". A female's voice is usually considered "very captivating". Men fall in love with the voice, simply for its belonging to the female, and allow themselves to make it sound the way they wish it to be.

Beauty and femininity are confined to mere appearance and looks. When the body of a "strangled infant" is discovered in the village, Nabawiyya is the first woman to be held in suspicion, as she is distinguished from the rest, by her "wide hips" and "fat legs" (signs of beauty). Fikrī Afandī finds it incredible that a man could have lusted after one from the outworn and emaciated tarḥīla women, for there is "none among them deserving the quality of femininity!"[2]

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1. Maḥfūẓ, Bain al Qaṣrain, p. 152, 295. Qaṣr al-Shawq, p. 88. H. Muʾnis, Ahlan wa Sahlan, p. 241.

2. Y. Idrīs, al-Ḥarām, p. 85.

The 'umda from Kafr Suhail, is beside himself when in a cabaret in Cairo watching the female dancers with their hundreds of pounds of "native butter, shaking and moving". He cannot help comparing these "beauties" in front of him with the women he left behind in the village. "By the great God! They are not women there . . . they are lizards, crocodiles, tortoises",[1] is his crude and sensual remark.

Throughout most of the novels, femininity equals a 'sponge like' flesh and fat. Girls are considered feminine from the early years when their body starts to develop. We are told that 'femininity radiates' from Amīna's body - though she is scarcely nine. The male characters appear to be impregnated with sensuality. To walk beside a nine year old girl with a "bowed head" because he is shy of her early femininity and ashamed of the feelings which this femininity arouses,[2] is saying much.

Nor can one find a true reflection of a feminine point of view of her qualities, in the detailed descriptions of the female attributes, by the male novelists. It is rather the adolescent male's sensual vision of a woman, the dream of the immature man, lacking in experience and urged by his sexual passion. Saniyya in 'Audat al Rūḥ, the young girl who "bewitched" by a glance the whole group of young men living opposite her, is portrayed by the

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1. Ḥ. Mu'nis, Ahlan wa Sahlan, p. 246.

2. I. 'Abd al-Quddūs, Anā Hurra, p. 28.

author as standing in front of the mirror in a "silk nightdress" contemplating her image with wonder: her "beautiful jet black hair", her "marble-like neck", her "firm breasts, whose outline is clearly seen through the "silk nightdress" and her "tiny waist" which she could "encircle with her hands". "She did not know she was as beautiful as all that".[1]

Throughout the majority of the novels, woman is treated as an 'attractive' animal to be pursued and devoured or as a helpless and capricious child to be spoilt or rebuked by man.

Girls are presented either as toys beneath man, or a sort of angel above him. As mentioned before, young Kamāl when introduced to ʿĀida, his friend's sister, finds himself confronting "a creature impossible to be of this earth".[2] When he tries to compare her to his sisters he drives the thought away asking God to forgive him for "my adored one has no likeness". He cannot imagine her in any of the traditional roles of a female, "how disgusting, nay, she is an angel on a fleeting visit to this world". When, years later, he enjoys the "white full body" of a female singer, he tries to recall ʿĀida's image, but it escapes him as she appears to have no body.[3]

The possibility that woman is neither a 'saint' above man, nor a 'plaything' beneath him, but an equal and a companion is

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1. al-Hakim, T., ʿAudat al Rūḥ, p. 155. A similar 'description' of ʿĀida is given by al-Sibāʿi in Innī Rāḥila, p. 131.

2. Maḥfūẓ, N., Qaṣr al-Shawq, p. 21.

3. Ibid., p. 49.

not conceived by the men novelists in general, as this involves a far deeper insight into the character and a thorough knowledge of the workings of the feminine mind than most seem capable to possess. The exceptions are Amīna, Su'ād, Ḥawwā'and Lailā to some extent. Generally, the novelists' statements and explanations are not sustained by the action of the characters involved. Consequently, the reader feels the contradiction between what the writer imposes on his character by way of 'traits' and the flatness of the picture that emerges.

Since most characters are not conceived in the 'round', little is seen of the psychological make-up which is usually the determining factor in the fate of the character concerned. The main weakness in the characterisation of the important female characters perhaps lies in the limited and shallow role assigned to them by the authors. They are seen only as the 'other party' in a superficially conceived 'love' relationship. Their creators do not place them in a challenging situation, that could have drawn out, in the hands of a skilful author, their inner forces and hidden strength and made them lifelike and true portraits. Moreover, one cannot speak of actions revealing their inner selves, as there rarely is an inner self. Nor are the actions, if there are any, motivated by the workings of the mind or the characters avowed desires. Their lives and actions are rather directed by external forces, in the form of the male characters, or environmental pressures. Ḥamīda leaves the Midaqq alley, not of her own initiative but is lured away by the "procurer" to a

life of light and comfort she coveted. The death of 'Abbās, her former fiancé, though because of her, is not planned by her. Lailā's final act of removing her engagement ring and accepting Husain as her future husband is brought about not by a change in her disposition as the author wishes to convey, but by an accident from without: the Suez War and the presence of Ḥusain in that area at the time. As for 'Azīza in al-Ḥarām, she is merely a victim of a chain of bad luck and cannot be held responsible for the main action round which the plot revolves. The author never gives her the slightest chance to decide for herself. Since they do not think or act independently, their impact on other characters, as well as on the course of events is negligible.

A general study of the novels reveals that the subject of marriage and the position of women within it leaves a great deal to be desired. Apart from al-Bāb al-Maftūḥ, Zainab, Shajarat al-Bu's, Anā Ḥurra and to a lesser extent Innī Rāḥila, arranged marriages and their consequences are not considered. No mention is made of the inner stresses of a marriage and the readjustment involved.

The timidity of the authors (Ṭāhā Ḥusain could be excluded) in confronting the marriage question, honestly and rationally is evident, first in their suppression of the very few characters in whom they have sown the seeds of rebellion against the conventional standards (Sawsan, Lailā) before they come to a proper flowering, and second, in bringing the whole issue to an irrelevant, conventional end by the fabrication of events (al-Ḥarām).

However, the novelists' evasion - with the exception of one or two and only to a certain extent - of such controversial subjects as polygamy, divorce, mixed marriages,[1] (Muslim to non-Muslim or vice versa) the compatibility of work and marriage, the double standard of morality and family planning, indicates a most limited and superficial outlook and reflects an unpraiseworthy indifference to the crucial questions of the day.

To sum up, novelists have on the whole not dealt with the fundamental issues from which woman suffers nor have they presented her as an independent human being and an individual in her own right. Such an attitude proves that woman's backwardness is but a reflection of man's and that her real emancipation is an integral part of the emancipation of man himself. For the man "who imagines, as a result of educational and psychological complexities from which he suffers, that he is a creature, who has the right to control and dominate the destiny of another creature, for no other reason than that he is the male and she the female, is in need of liberation himself from those complexities and illnesses, to the same degree that woman needs to be free from man's enslavement of her."[2]

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1. Linda, the daughter of Masīḥa Afandī, a Christian, "disappears" and marries Aḥmad Afandī Sulṭān, a Muslim. However, the author does not develop the issue. Y. Idrīs, al-Ḥarām, p. 140.

2. I. Badrān, "Mulāḥaẓāt Ḥawl Ba'ḍ al-Qiyam wa al-Mafāhīm", al-Shabāb al-'Arabī, Cairo, 1969, No. 115.

CHAPTER V

IGNORANCE

Historical Survey

> "Egypt is rightly regarded as an underdeveloped country', writes Issawi, '... human resources have been hardly tapped, relatively to those not only of advanced but even of comparatively backward countries."[1]

To understand the causes of Egypt's backwardness and make clear to oneself the peculiar character of Egyptian education, one must understand the complex nature of its cultural heritage which goes back six thousand years.

The Egyptians in virtue of their geographical position have been involved for over many centuries in a process of cultural exchange with the other peoples of the world. They gave to the ancient world "elements of religion, science, arts, crafts and moral ideals" and have in turn been influenced by the "philosophy and science of the Greeks, the religions of the Christians and the Arabs and the science and democratic institutions of Western Europe".[2] This cultural exchange resulted in a complex tradition; the different elements of which it is composed are involved in an ever increasing conflict.

For over a century and a half the old elements have been steadily undermined by the indispensable elements of modern science.

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1. Issawi, Egypt at Mid-century, p. 90.
2. Radwan, Old and New Forces in Egyptian Education, p. 23.

The conflict is growing as the impact of the latter is gaining force through steady contact with the modern, technologically oriented way of life in the advanced countries of the world.

Ancient Egyptian civilisation is not the primary source of Egypt's present ways of living and thinking. The very functional application of Egyptian science and its practical control of the environment[1] is absent from modern Egyptian social and educational spheres, so is the "faith in the dignity and power of man".[2]

In comparison with ancient Egypt, Islamic civilisation has maintained its continuity with the present. Islam's profound influence resulted from the fact that as a religion it did not confine itself to dealing purely with supernatural matters. Religious teaching was integrated with fundamental laws of social conduct. The Qur'ān contained principles for conducting family life and business dealings; principles of criminal law and principles for the jihād . In short, Islam aimed at regulating "all the details of existence" and shaping and maintaining human society "according to a divine plan".[3]

However, Islam in Egypt through the centuries became coloured by the political and social experiences peculiar to that country.

It was this Islamic civilisation with its peculiarly Egyptian characteristics which experienced the impact of modern Western

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1. Ibid., p.29
2. Ibid., pp.34, 38
3. Pierre Arminjon, L'Enseignement, La Doctrine et La Vie Dans les Universités Musulmanes d'Égypte (Paris, 1907), p.6, quoted in Radwan, Old and New Forces, p.39.

civilisation, from the day Napoleon's guns bombarded Alexandria on the first July 1798. From that date to the present day the cultural situation in Egypt has been that of a Muslim culture "attempting to adjust to the modern world and to adopt its institution and techniques".[1]

The attempt to reconcile modern sciences with Islam posed a great problem, for science had been neglected for centuries. With the victory of the Scholastic Theologians in the tenth and eleventh centuries, progressive thought and intellectual liberty came to a halt. Rigid in mind and intolerant of any free thinking they supressed philosophy and reasoning. Orthodoxy and mysticism possessed the field. Science was to be tolerated only in so far as it did not "touch upon religion".[2] Religious law became a body of stagnant and rigid rules preserved and taught in the mosque-colleges. Later, this repressive tradition was carried even further and is reflected in the writings of many theologians. 'Alā' al-Dīn al-Ḥasafkī, for example, wrote in 1677 that "learning is a personal duty in so far as it is necessary for one's religious needs and voluntary if it is needed for the use of others ... and forbidden when it deals with philosophy, sorcery, astrology, natural science, magic and fortune telling".[3]

Writings on history or theology though abundant were on the

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1. Radwan, op.cit., p.41
2. al-Ghazālī, al-Munqidh min al-Dalāl (Damascus, 1939), pp. 90, 92, 95.
3. 'Alā' al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Ḥasafkī, al-Durr al-Mukhtār Sharh Tanwīr al-Absār, vol. I, p.30. Quoted by Muṣṭafā 'Abd al-Rāziq, Tamhīd Li Tarīkh al-Falsafa al-Islāmiyya (Cairo 1944), p.89, in Radwan, op. cit., p. 45.

whole mere compilations or imitations of previous works. They were uncritical, lacking in ideas and originality.[1]

The decline in learning and the intellectual barrenness were exposed when the Egyptian 'ulamā' - the country's intellectual élite - were confronted with the modern scientific Western culture at the turn of the eighteenth century. Many of them expressed disbelief in the various chemical experiments they were invited to witness. Al-Jabartī in recording his visits expressed wonder at what could be achieved with science and noted that many experiments "cannot be comprehended by the minds of people like us".[2] Opposition in the realm of medicine, agriculture and veterinary science was strong. The Arabic printing press introduced by the French was condemned as "atheistic".[3]

As contacts grew with the West and with French scientists in particular during the nineteenth century, the more enlightened among the 'ulamā' sought to reinterpret the orthodox tradition concerning science. They tried to substitute for the 'authoritarian conception' the view that Islam relied on the reason and personal conviction of individual human beings.[4] Muḥammad ʿAbduh, writing at the beginning of the twentieth century stated that God's

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1. R.A. Nicholson, A Literary History of the Arabs, 7 ed. (Cambridge 1962), p.453.
2. 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Jabartī, 'Ajā'ib al-Āthār fī al-Tarājim wa al-Akhbār (Cairo, A.H. 1297= A.D. 1879), Vol. III, p. 36
3. ʿAlī Mubārak, al-Khiṭat al-Tawfīqiyyah, (Cairo 1888), Vol. XIII p. 55.
4. Muḥammed ʿAbduh, Risālaẗ al-Tawḥīd (Cairo 1942), pp. 182-183.

promise to complete His light will only be fulfilled once religion and science go hand in hand and "Co-operate together in rectifying both the intellect and the feeling."[1]

The length to which modern interpreters have gone to reconcile the findings of science with the teachings of Islam are best illustrated in the answer of Muḥammad Farīd Wajdī, the editor of the review al-Azhar, to the problem of a probable contradiction arising between the conclusions of science and the apparent meaning of religious texts. He states that "in the case of a conflict between the conclusion of reason and the evident meaning of the Qur'ān or the Tradition, the conclusion reached by reason should be given to the text". [2]

However, the criticism levelled at education in Egypt at present for its "non-functional"[3] character is largely due to the old Islamic concept of education which projected itself on the new, and marked it with its own characteristics. The fact that modern science, the first contribution of the West to Egypt, was accepted as a body of ready-made information and laws, perpetuated the tradition of the sacredness of texts and the method of committing them to memory. The concept of knowledge as a mere memorisation of a subject and the assessment of competence in terms of information

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1. Muḥammad 'Abduh, al-Islām wa al-Naṣrāniyya (Cairo 1938) pp. 136, 137.
2. Muḥammad Farīd Wajdī, al-Islām Dīn 'Ām Khālid, (Cairo 1932) p.59
3. Radwan, op. cit., p.151

accumulated, hampered the true cultivation of the mind and the development of character. Life was divorced from education and any defect in society tended to be seen as the result of ignorance in some single field of knowledge. This it was believed could be overcome by simply adding to the school curriculum a new subject relating to that field.[1]

The failure to realise that the scientific advance of the West was made possible by the spirit that drives man to discover the truth, based on his observation and experiment, lies at the root of Egypt's present backwardness. This failure may be the fault of the authoritarian system controlling Egypt as much as of the educational methods of the past. Speedy changes modelled on a foreign culture were imposed from above rather than left to develop naturally according to the needs of the people and the country.[2] Therefore the response to Western civilisation did not signify more than "a mere shift from one fixed pattern of culture to another. The rulers desired to get knowledge and the power of science without introducing its principles of thought and procedure into the life of the people."[3]

The political decline in the Islamic world in the eleventh century was accompanied as has been mentioned earlier by a "consolidation of conservative orthodoxy"[4] Egypt's political and

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1. Ibid., pp. 124-125.
2. Ibid., pp. 162-163.
3. Ibid, p.152.
4. Gustav E. von Grünebaum, Medieval Islam (Chicago 1953), p. 241

social conditions acted most favourably in perpetuating the orthodox system. For centuries, under the domination of foreign powers, Egypt has suffered political oppression and intensive economic exploitation. The masses were crushed by heavy taxation. A series of famines and plagues added to their long record of misery.[1]

The society on which the group of 'learned men' the ʿulamāʾ, exercised their religious influence was divided into a minority of Mamluk amīrs, the privileged military class, and a majority of serfs or semi-serfs working in the fields and towns, reduced to destitution under the feudal system. Insecurity and the brutality of the Mamluks drove the masses to look up to the ʿulamāʾ, to defend them against oppression, as they were the only Egyptian "class" which enjoyed civil and economic privileges on account of the religious nature of education, in an age "when religion had such a tremendous grasp on the minds of the people."[2]

The same education served the rulers as a tool of social and political control. It was meant to create submission and uncritical subjects and enslave society to a set of fixed beliefs and standards. Realising the influence the ʿulamāʾ could exercise on the ignorant masses, the Mamluks encouraged it. Through the ʿulamāʾ they could secure the submission of the people to their barbarous way of government. Moreover, despotism had been formally

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1. Issawi, op. cit., p. 8. The most terrible famines were experienced in A.D. 928, 967, 1064-72, 1201, 1262 and 1294.

2. Radwan, op. cit., p. 74.

recognised by the early Scholastic Theologians as Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī's and al-Ghazālī's writings illustrate.[1]

The feudal agriculture system and the medieval culture which had persisted for centuries was deeply shaken as noted above by the French invasion (1798). Western culture vastly superior, exposed the inadequacy and archaism of the medieval Islamic culture, the moment the two armies met. Despite the brevity of the encounter (1798-1801) between the two civilisations, the impact in terms of ultimate effect upon Egyptian life can hardly be exaggerated. The military and scientific superiority of the West were not lost on Muḥammad ʿAlī, when four years later he took control of the country (1805). In order to build a strong army, he attempted to create an industrialised and state-controlled economy, in place of the small home industry and the feudal economy. These changes demanded an education more in line with the natural sciences of Europe than with the existing religious and linguistic teachings. Thus a new modern system of education was created, suitable to his training in the shortest possible time "a body of assistants who would master European technique sufficiently well to help him run

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1. Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī (d.935) wrote: "We maintain the error of those who hold it right to rise against Imams whensoever there may be apparent in them a falling-away from right". Quoted by Muhibul Ḥasan Khān, "Medieval Muslim Political Theories of Rebellion Against the State", Islamic Culture, Vol. XVIII, No, 1 (January 1944), p.38. Quoted by Radwan, op.cit., p.74; al-Ghazālī supported the argument. He contended that aknowledgement of the existing power whatever it be is preferred to anarchy and the stoppage of social life for lack of a properly constituted authority. Quoted by De Santillana, "Law and Society", The Legacy of Islam, p.302.

a modern army and administration."[1] The culture on which he attempted to model Egypt was that of France. Students on missions were sent there to study, while European specialists staffed the new high schools in Egypt.

The new system of education did not put an end to the old one which continued to exist in much the same way as it had done for centuries.[2] Moreover, as has been mentioned above, Islamic education found many ways of influencing the modern schools, the most lasting and harmful of which was its methods of study. However, despite the shortcomings of the new system the impact of Western culture started to show. A new group of "intellectuals" began to supplant the Azhar shaikhs as the educational and cultured élite. Their influence was noticed in the second half of the nineteenth century during the reign of Isma'īl. Vigorous attempts were made to increase the number of schools and improve the level of education.[3] Public education was advocated with the aim of "creating in coming generations a consciousness of their rights and their responsibilities towards themselves, their families and their native country."[4]

The "democratic orientation"[5] in education received a set back

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1. Issawi, op. cit., p. 27.
2. Radwan, op. cit., p. 112.
3. Ibid., p. 93.
4. Ibid.
5. A resolution of the House of Deputies in December, 1868, called for the opening of schools in every province to teach reading, writing and other sciences. See ʿAbd al-Karīm, Tarīkh al-Taʿlīm fī Misr (Cairo, 1945), Vol. III, p. 24.

with the British occupation of Egypt (1882). The educational policy of the British was coloured by their position as an occupying power. It was distinguished by three main aims which it successfully pursued: (1) to keep the level of education low,[1] (2) to decrease the number of students in secondary and higher schools,[2] (3) to encourage passiveness and submission to authority.[3] The first and third steps were adopted as a safeguard against the rise of men with initiative and personality.[4] As for the second, education for the first time in Egypt's history became

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1. The kuttābs were encouraged and considered suitable for the people, though the education provided was practically useless. Issawi, op. cit., p. 51. Modern education was given little attention and kept to the minimum necessary for securing "a standard sufficient for filling clerical jobs (Ibid. p. 50). This is supported by Radwan, who writes that, "all subjects which would help build a socially intelligent mind were excluded from the curricula". Radwan, op. cit., pp. 94, 101. Muḥammad ʿAbduh describing the situation to De Guerville points out that Social Economy, Politics, Philosophy, Literature and Fine Arts are "not taught in Egypt in any school". De Guerville, New Egypt (London, 1905), p. 161.

2. The capacity of the few remaining modern schools was curbed by two means: high fees and rigid systems of examination. See A.S. White, The Expansion of Egypt (London, 1899), pp. 228-229; also G.W. Steevens, Egypt in 1898 (New York 1898), p. 107.

3. The sole aim of education became the turning out of submissive government officials with an entirely passive nature. "A man in the smallest degree independent will not be admitted, or if by mistake he should be, he will not remain long". From Muḥammad ʿAbduh to De Guerville, De Guerville, op. cit., pp. 160-161. Also E.W. Polson Newman, Great Britain in Egypt (London, 1928), p. 230.

4. Lord Cromer, Modern Egypt, vol. ii, p. 534

exclusively the privilege of the rich.[1] By enforcing this policy the British encouraged the traditions of the old system and reversed the trend towards modernism and the promotion of education begun under Muḥammad ʿAlī.

From the third decade of the twentieth century onward, when the struggle for "independence" was over, Egypt embarked on a vast educational programme which gained a new impetus twice: after 1945 and after 1952. A universal and compulsory system of education was decided on;[2] the dual system of education was eliminated (1949);[3] girls were to be given the same educational opportunities as boys,[4] and ideas for the abolition of the private system of the

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1. From Muḥammad ʿAbduh to De Guerville, June 6, 1905. De Guerville, op. cit., p. 158. Also Radwan, op. cit., p. 95.

2. Radwan, op. cit., pp. 106-107. "The New Law of Elementary Education", February 1949, declared in Article I that "Elementary Education ... is compulsory for all boys and girls", from the age of six until they reach the age of twelve. Article 4 stipulated that "education should be free for all children on the elementary level."

3. Issawi, op. cit., p. 67. Until 1949 Egypt had a dual system of education; primary, secondary and higher schools for the well-to-do, and elementary schools for the mass of the population. "It has been considered undemocratic to have ... a superior and comprehensive programme for those who can afford to pay a small proportion of the expenses of their education, and an inferior and dead-end programme for those who cannot." Radwan, op. cit., p. 108.

4. In 1945 the state had only nine secondary schools for girls, with thirteen secondary classes attached to girls' primary schools, with a total enrolment of 3,957, while it had fifty secondary schools for boys and fifty-four classes attached to boys' primary schools with a total enrolment of 35,435. As for primary schools, there were 214 for boys and only 64 for girls with an enrolment of 51,857 and 12,919 respectively. Radwan, op. cit., p. 111.

Azhar, whose reform had reached a dead end in 1930, were advanced.[1]

Considerable success has been achieved in terms of quantity.[2] As for the quality of the education, it leaves much to be desired. It has not produced a human being with a new social outlook and a mentality that is able to cope with the demands of the scientific age. To realise this objective a new conception of education has to be developed. Mere establishment of new schools and the addition of subject matter achieves little, so long as the educational method breeds an individual "who passively accepts the external pressures of life and authorities and who is content to conform to policies and plans designed by his superiors in the social hierarchy."[3]

It is evident from what has been mentioned so far, that several factors have contributed to the low quality of present day Egyptian education. The fact is that it is the product of its own long and varied history, a history closely related to the economic, political and social conditions and demands of certain ages.

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1. Education leaders criticised the system on the grounds that it helps to create two types of mentalities so long as it exists alongside the national system, "the graduate of the Azhar conceives any issue that arises in one sense, while the graduate of the modern schools conceives it in another sense". Tāhā Ḥusain, Mustaqbal al-Thaqāfa fī Miṣr (Cairo, 1938), p. 64.

2. See Issawi, op. cit., p. 67. For details see Issawi, Egypt in Revolution, p. 98.

3. Radwan, op. cit., p. 153.

Aspects of Ignorance

Superstitions

Lane in his book on the manners and customs of the modern Egyptians stated that "the Arabs are a very superstitious people; and none of them more so than those of Egypt."[1]

Throughout the centuries, the fact that the various foreign rulers of Egypt had their own warriors to support them and realise the despotic nature of their regimes, excluded the vast majority of the population from the military as well as administrative offices. With the exception of a small group occupying non-military offices, contact between rulers and subjects was minimal. Any 'ideas' circulating in the governing upper stratum would scarcely have reached, let alone influenced, the native population. Even at the height of the Hellenistic Age, only a fraction of society, the wealthier urban natives, who mixed with the 'ruling' Greeks, were interested in the achievements of the mind and speculated along scientific lines.[2] Muslim Egypt did not fare any better. In spite of the 'philanthropic nature' (mosque-colleges were financed by the waqfs and students lived in the riwāqs and received the jirāyah) of education at the time, only a small minority joined the mosque-colleges. The rest of the people remained illiterate. Worn out with physical toil in their struggle for survival the masses could not afford the time for abstract

1. E.W. Lane, op. cit., p. 228.
2. See "Hellenistic Age " Encyclopaedia Britannica, Vol 11, p. 328, 14th ed.

theology[1]. Endless exploitation and persecution rendered life bleak and harsh and resulted in moral and intellectual misery besides physical poverty. Longing for a better life, they sought solace and relief in the world of magic and the supernatural.

Despite the relative spread of education in the hundred years that have passed since Lane's remark, it cannot be said that the average Egyptian's way of thinking has altered greatly. Many still indulge in superstitious practices, and superstition is still widespread in present day Egypt.[2] Among the superstitions which have a grip on the people are the 'jinn'.[3] They are not creatures of pure fantasy but have their roots in the Qur'ān. They are mentioned in several Sūras.[4] The evil ones among them known as ʿafārīt are credited with great powers.[5] Whether muslim or non-muslim those of them who rebelled are known as the shayātīn or devils, Iblīs being their chief. Stories about the origin of the jinn and their exploits abound but many are not aknowledged by the Qur'ān.

Ṭāhā Ḥusain in Shajarat al-Bu's sheds light on the hold the

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1. Radwan, op. cit., p. 72
2. Rose al-Yūsuf, No. 2190, pp. 22-29, June 1st 1970; Radwan, op. cit., pp. 138-139; W.S. Blackman, pp. 188,220,229 ff.; Ayrout, op. cit., pp. 100, 123 ff.
3. Aḥmad Amīn expresses surprise at the number of books written on the subject of the jinn and the means by which to secure their services. Manuscripts are preferred to printed editions by the public. Aḥmad Amīn, Qāmūs al-ʿĀdāt wa al-Taqālīd wa al-Taʿābīr al-Misriyya (Cairo, 1953), pp. 116-117.
4. Qur'ān, Sūra $6^{100, 112, 128}$ and Sūra $34^{12,13,14}$. However, jinn and ʿafarīt played a significant role in the life and literature of pre-Islamic Arabs. See ʿAbd al-Majīd, The Modern Arabic Short Story, p. 34.
5. Qur'ān, Sūra 27^{39}.

jinn' have on ignorant folk, and the role they play in their lives. Nafīsa, the 'ugly' and simple wife of the devout Khālīd is on the verge of throwing herself into a hot oven in imitation of Umm ʿUthmān, whose story she had just heard related by an Umm Raḍwān and believed to be true. The story itself is interesting in that it reflects the common belief in the capability of the jinn to assume the shape of human beings and perform their functions. Attempting to prove the truth of what she is about to relate, Umm Raḍwān tells the women gathered round her that one night she was baking bread for a neighbour of hers with the above mentioned Umm ʿUthmān and others sitting around her. A village woman entered, frightened and distressed, and told them that while she and her friends were on their way home after filling their jars from the canal, they heard and saw women slapping their faces and singing in lament, that a certain Yaḥyā Abū ʿUmar who was on his death bed wondered whether a Nashr al-Zahr would be able to come and see him. "No sooner had this village woman told her news', continued Umm Raḍwān, 'than to our surprise Umm ʿUthmān started screaming, pulling her hair, tearing her clothes, slapping her face and beating her chest. After a while she told us in a broken voice that she was Nashr al-Zahr and that ʿUmar Abū Yaḥyā was her brother. She asked us to give her regards to her husband and look after her son ʿUthmān as she had to go and see her brother before he died ... and perhaps return when the years of mourning were over. We thought', said the narrator Umm Raḍwān, 'that the woman had gone

mad, but to our surprise she threw herself into the hot oven. We realised that she was a female jinn who had assumed the shape of woman, married Abū ʿUthmān and borne him a child. When she heard of her brother's imminent death, she took the shortest route to him. That is why an oven should never be heated without first mentioning the name of God, so that all the devils will be evicted", concluded Umm Raḍwān wisely.[1]

The belief that the jinn inhabit houses, empty rooms in particular, is widespread and occurs in several novels. In his autobiographical novel, al-Ayyām, Ṭāhā Ḥusain relates how as a child he hated to uncover his face or any part of his limbs, for he was sure were he to do it, "one of the many ʿifrīts lurking in the house would get at him."[2] In Bain al-Qaṣrain Amīna, (the wife of ʿAbd al-Jawwād) stands in great awe of the jinn. She passes the most frightening hours every night while awaiting the return of her husband. With a lamp in her hand, accompanied by a woman-servant, she checks each room of the house on her evening round, then closes it properly, whilst reciting verses from the Qur'ān "to ward off the devils".[3] When she finally reaches her room, she locks the door, tucks herself in bed, still reciting, until she is overcome by sleep. She is quite sure, for her "knowledge of the world of the jinn exceeds by far that of humans", that she is not

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1. Ṭāhā Ḥusain, Shajarat al-Bu's, pp. 136-138; According to various literary and historical works, Bilqīs, the queen of Saba' (Sheba) is the daughter of a jinnī mother. Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā', Kisā'ī and Tha'labī, quoted by ʿAbd al-Majīd, op. cit., p. 34.
2. Ṭāhā Ḥusain, al-Ayyām, p. 7
3. Maḥfūẓ, Bain al-Qaṣrain, p. 7.

the only inhabitant of the big house. The jinn may have lived there long before she came, or even before she was born, for "how often did she hear their whisper; how often was she awakened by the heat of their breath."[1] Years later, she used to hold her child protectively in her arms, listen with awe, then raise her voice as if addressing someone present and ask to be left alone, "this is not your place, we are muslims, believers in the Oneness of God".[2]

Amīna's confidence in her information concerning the jinn springs from her unquestioning belief in her father who was one of the 'ulamā' whom God had "preferred to the rest of his subjects, because he knew the Qur'ān by heart". From him she learnt all she knew of "myths" which in her mind "seemed to be religion in its essence".[3] Her 'folkloric culture' is shaken one day when her youngest son, Kamāl, informs her that his teacher sees no harm in mentioning the jinn, as some of them are actual believers. Embarrassed and at a loss she does not know how to explain it. Upset, she says, "perhaps others among them are not (believers) so it is better for us not to mention their names," and concludes that the teacher does not necessarily know everything. "Even if the name is included in a holy verse?", asks her son slyly.[4] Shaken but adamant to preserve her world, she closes the subject with the

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1. Ibid., pp. 7-8.
2. Ibid., p. 8.
3. Ibid., p. 74.
4. Ibid., pp. 76-77.

common non-committal phrase: "All words of our Lord are blessed".[1]

It is worth mentioning here that these 'haunting' jinn and ʿafārīt, seem to disappear with the first rays of light. In both cases, Amīna's and Ṭāhā Ḥusain's, they do not seem to trouble them during the day.[2] It is believed they vanish into the underworld, a curious relic of ancient myth, where night is synonymous with mystery, and darkness with evil and man in his ignorance interpreted the laws of nature according to his need and use of them.

Ṭāhir Lāshīn, as noted in the previous chapter, has illustrated in Ḥawwāʾ bilā Ādam, how a life in which the brain is stagnant needs to be sustained, if only by a world of dreams and the supernatural, hence the importance of the jinnī and the ʿifrīt and the methods used to get in touch with them or get rid of them.[3] It proved a worthwhile occupation for what would otherwise have been an empty and meaningless existence. We are told how Ḥawwā's grandmother in her youth chose one "small ʿifrīt" called Surūr from among many, interpreting her various moods as Surūr's mischievous conduct and demands. However, with the passing of years it appears that Surūr is no longer keen on possessing her as often as he did before because it does not fit with the dignity of a grandmother to do so."[3] Nevertheless, Surūr's power is still to be reckoned with

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1. Ibid., p. 77.
2. Ṭāhā Ḥusain, al-Ayyām, p. 9
3. Lāshīn, op. cit., p. 35.

whenever an incident occurs that runs contrary to the grandmother's wishes, as is evident in the case of Ḥawwā's scholarship to England. Surūr is dead against the separation which such a mission will bring about. He swears to do all in his power to wreck the plan. Magic is resorted to. Charms are written, holy water is used, besides various other 'performances' which exhaust the grandmother, but not in vain. Surūr has his wish realised. He wins. Ḥawwā' remains at home, against her wish. It so happened that another girl with influential connections is preferred to her at the last moment, an outcome which greatly delights the grandmother and which she unhesitatingly attributes to the workings of Surūr.[1]

The belief of the public in the supernatural powers of imaginary beings, was extended to the belief in the extraordinary powers of human beings like themselves, but who were distinguished from ordinary mortals by being "favourites of God".[2] Many among the people firmly believe in the saintliness of men they call walī and in the existence of what might be called a hierarchy of saints.[3]

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1. Ibid., pp. 44-45.
2. Qur'ān, Sūra 56[11]
3. Lane writes: "The most holy of the welees is termed the Kutb; ... The term "kutb" signifies an axis; and hence is applied to a welee who rules over others; they depending upon him, and being subservient to him ... The kutb who exercises a superintendence over all other welees ... has, under his authority, welees of different ranks, to perform different offices; "Nakeebs", ... "Bedeels", etc.; who are known only to each other and perhaps to the rest of the welees, as holding such offices. Lane, Manners and Customs, p.236 The worship of saints is not Qur'anic. But Islam "had to yield on this point to the pressure of popular sentiment, which by its traditions, its tendency to the marvellous and other psychological factors is strongly inclined to this way of expressing its religious feelings." See "Walī", Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam, eds. H.A.R. Gibbs and J.H. Kramers.

The stricy transcendentalism of Islam[1] drove man to look for an intermediary endowed with qualities which raised him above the ordinary human being thus enabling him to act on man's behalf.

The power of these men to perform miracles is relative to their degree of faith. "Since Islam has set up no authority to investigate and determine the claim of a devotee to be worshipped as a saint, it is public opinion that bestows the status of walī on an individual."[2] Among the lower classes many an idiot or fool is regarded as a walī, venerated and feared, so long as his madness remains harmless. Once the saintly myth woven round him drops, for one reason or another no leniency or compassion can be expected from the people towards him.[3]

One should not overlook the varying credulity of different sections of society about such beliefs. The prosperous, whether rural or urban, are far less gullible about the powers of some of the awliyā', whom they regard as impostors. The 'umda of Kafr Suhail in Ahlan wa Sahlan, though no less ignorant than his villagers, is far too shrewd to be taken in, on a visit to the famous shrine of

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1. " ... between Allah and the believer there is no mediator; Islam has no church, no priests, no sacraments". David De Santillana, "Law and Society", The Legacy of Islam, eds. Sir Thomas Arnold and Alfred Guillaume (Oxford, 1931), p. 287
2. G.E. von Grünebaum, Muhammadan Festivals (New York, 1951), p. 72.
3. The novelette al-Shaikh Sayyid al-'Abīt, illustrates this point most vividly. From a favoured respected 'man of God' whose most incoherent idiotic words are considered by the villagers as inspired, whose every action is interpreted as a karāma, the shaikh is transformed in a matter of days into a 'devil' and as such has to be persecuted. It never occurs to the villagers that he is neither saint nor devil, but a man who suffers from mental derangement and behaves accordingly. M. Taymūr, al-Shaikh Sayyid al-'Abīt (Cairo 1926). Also see Grünebaum, op. cit., p. 72.

al-Ḥusain in Cairo, by the whirlings of a clownish figure dressed in multi-coloured rags and incessantly repeating "in a hateful voice, amorous phrases" whilst begging for alms. Nor is he at all perturbed when that same figure invokes God's wrath on him, for having had the audacity to hold him by the neck and throw him out onto the street, despite the fact, that bystanders beg the 'clown' "the pigeon of the shrine" not to be too harsh on the 'umda, lest he be sent to "fire", for he is according to them but an ignorant peasant!"[1]

Deceased saints are venerated and honoured more than the living ones. Visits to the tombs and sanctuaries are frequently paid by the masses. The most sacred of the sanctuaries is that of al-Ḥusain, the grandson of Muḥammad. No visit by villagers to Cairo is considered complete unless honour is paid to the shrine of al-Ḥusain. Not only does a villager offer his prayers for his own merit but does so for family and friends in the village in the expectancy of blessings from the holiest of saints.[2] Amīna's one wish is to visit al-Ḥusain. In the twenty-five years of her marriage, being a prisoner of her house, her eyes used to settle on the beloved minaret of that mosque with longing and tenderness. When the great day eventually comes she is overwhelmed by her emotions. As she stand in front of the tomb, she wishes to stay there as long as possible so as "to get her fill of the taste of

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1. Ḥusain Mu'nis, Ahlan wa Sahlan, p. 197.
2. al-Sharqāwī, al-Ard, p. 143; Mu'nis, Ahlan wa Sahlan, p. 134; Ṭāhā Ḥusain, al-Ayyām, Vol.I, p. 64.

happiness" had it not been for the pressure of the crowd. She stretches her hand to the wooden walls, recites the Fātiha, then carresses and kisses them, praying all the time.[1]

Female saints especially al-Sayyida Zainab and al-Sayyida Nafīsa enjoy on account of their relation to the Prophet, an important status, in particular the former. Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī in his novel Qindīl Umm Hāshim whose title refers to the lamp of the 'Sacred Lady', presents an interesting study of the role this 'Lady' plays in the life of the populace and their implicit belief in her miraculous power, manifest among other things in the oil of the lamp hanging over her shrine. This is accepted by many as 'holy', thus giving relief from various diseases, opthalmia in particular. It is in the interest of Shaikh Dardarī its custodian, to further this repute as it provides him with a good income. The young doctor returning from England, full of enthusiasm and faith in science, hopes to convert the people to his modern outlook. He has not reckoned with the tremendous hold the 'sacred oil' as a 'healer' has on the mentality of the people. His endeavour to propogate the superiority of science, meets with strong resistance which defeats his purpose.[2]

Written charms, alum, blue beads, cowries, blessed water, all are used as preventives or cures. Belief in the evil eye in particular is still widespread and people go to great lengths to

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1. Maḥfūẓ, Bain al-Qasrain, pp. 42, 194.
2. Ḥaqqī, Qindīl Umm Hāshim, pp. 39-40, 55-58.

ward off its influence.[1]

Charm-makers continue to make a good living in urban centres as well as villages. Ṭāhir Lāshīn gives an interesting and revealing description of a charm dealer and his shop. Shaikh Muṣṭafā specialises in selling "all articles of magic". His shop is a conglomeration of "serpent fangs", "hyaena claws", the "shell of a tortoise" and the "nails of a bat". Beads of various colours, sea shells and strange looking fruit with "even stranger names" hang down from the ceiling. Above it all floats a huge fish in mid-air. A number of boxes are filled with all kinds of powder which "join hearts" and "separate them" "stop one's livelihood" or "settle it", bring "sanity" or "madness", according to the customer's wishes.[2]

Ḥawwā''s grandmother fills the house with written charms in her hope of curing Ḥawwā' of her intense depression, the cause of which is unknown to her. Though all her efforts fail, her belief in the power of magical cures is not diminished. According to her it is a question of finding and applying the right kind of magic. She comes to the conclusion that Ḥawwā' is possessed by a mighty spirit. With the help of Shaikh Muṣṭafā and an elderly neighbour she goes through the ritual of exorcising it.[3]

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1. "To the Egyptian peasants the fear of the evil eye is a very real terror from infancy to old age." W.S. Blackman, The Fellahin of Upper Egypt (London, 1968), pp. 218-222. Many city dwellers interviewed by the present writer (1965) held the same belief in and dread of the evil eye.
2. Lāshīn, op. cit., pp. 17-19.
3. Ibid., pp. 138-141.

The recourse to magic whenever people are confronted with the mysterious or unpredictable in an attempt to find the hoped for cure or prevention of the feared evil, illustrates how little progress science has made among the masses. Tremendous effort will be needed to help the development of a scientific mentality. There is no doubt that a large number of the better educated reject such irrational practices. Ḥawwā' acquiesces,[1] only out of respect for her grandmother's wish and for the sake of peace and quiet. Yet, whenever she remembers the "act" she is "filled with anger and shame".[2] But the vast majority of society in their insecurity and fear of the unknown read into everything confronting them a good or bad omen. Their life is literally submerged in superstitions.[3] A minor incident occurring in al-Ard is of significance in illustrating this point. Muḥammad Afandī, the village teacher on his way to the railway station comes across a peasant girl carrying an empty jar. The moment she sees him, knowing his errand, she turns round, enters into one of the fields, places her jar on the ground and bends her head over it keeping her back to the street. Her 'action' please Muḥammad Afandī. He regards it a good omen. The girl does not wish him to confront an empty jar, a sign of failure, on his important mission to Cairo.[4]

In connection with the exorcising of evil or mighty spirits, a

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1. Ibid., p. 138.
2. Ibid., p. 144.
3. W.S. Blackman, op. cit., pp.98ff., 183, 190, 197. See also Ḥaqqī, Qindīl Umm Hāshim, pp. 16,45.
4. al-Sharqāwī, op. cit., p. 147.

practice known as al-zār, peculiar to women, has taken on a ritual significance and is frequently held.[1] The chanting and dancing, the various observances including the change of attire fitting the 'spirits' involved, give the atmosphere a theatrical touch.[2] The performance, could in the light of modern scientific interpretation be explained as an outlet for suppressed sexual feelings and the psychological and physical disturbances ensuing from it. This practice, though widespread among the women of the lower stratum in particular, is not reflected in the novels, except for a casual hint made by a character here or there.[3]

It is obvious from the above that those who engage in superstitious practices form the majority. It is also obvious that the oppressed and exploited sections of society, namely, the peasants and women, are the least exposed to change and consequently have retained superstitious beliefs most strongly.

Many of the superstitions are not merely regarded as such by the peasant. They have taken on a religious meaning. In repeating these rites, he "shows an instinctive feeling for the soil", and an "intimate bond" with the Nile.[4] There is no doubt that the Nile played a major role in influencing the peasant's mode of life and in moulding his outlook. His existence depended on the yield of

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1. Rose al-Yūsuf, Nos. 2190, 2191, 2192. June 1970; also Blackman, op. cit., p. 198.
2. Rose al-Yūsuf, No. 2190, pp. 22-29, June 1970. For details see Aḥmad Amīn, Qāmūs al-'Ādāt, p. 217.
3. Tāhā Ḥusain, Shajarat al-Bu's, p. 39.
4. Ayrout, The Egyptian Peasant, p. 131.

the land, governed in turn by the flow of the Nile, over which he had no power. Anything that could help in bringing about a better harvest, either by fighting off or inviting Natural forces, coloured his thinking and constituted his religious, ethical and social beliefs and customs.

Most of the present day traditional rites and customs which the peasant observes at every turn of his life go back beyond Islam and Christianity to Pharaonic times.[1] However very little is to be found in the novels of the old surviving practices. Their paralysing effect on the attitude and outlook of the peasant is not considered either. The silt of the Nile still plays its part in the rites of life and death. The "fruits of the earth" are still closely involved in peasant magic.[2] But the peasant's closeness to the soil is not the only reason for the persistance of these traditions. At the root of this continuation of the past into the present lies the dichotomy between the city as the seat of power and the countryside, a separation which across long centuries has accentuated the isolation of the peasant and driven him ever closer to the land. Any change was confined as has been noted, to the very small urban élite. The villagers continued living their own self-centred life, observing the same customs their forefathers had done before them, accumulating myths and beliefs that had undergone the process of

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1. For details on traditions and rites relating to the soil and the Nile see Ayrout, op. cit., pp. 132-134. See also W. Blackmam, op. cit., chapters vi, vii, and x, in particular.

2. Ayrout, op. cit., p. 133.

localisation. Thus , Christianity and Islam were in turn transformed by the practical religion of the masses, becoming an excessively superstitious group ritual and ceremony.[1]

Closely connected with the mediation and veneration of saints are the celebrations held yearly in commemoration of their birthday, the mawlid. The mawlid is a day of great rejoicing in the village and one of the few occasions that highlight the peasant's life. His pilgrimage to the site of the 'holy man' whether local or at the district level, in order to receive his blessing and join in or watch the ceremonies held, fill him with spiritual and physical satisfaction. It is regrettable that the novels do not give a detailed picture of one of the grand scale mawlids which attract thousands of peasants.

The cult of the mawlid took root in Egypt with the growth of various mystical brotherhoods.[2] In addition to the recitation from or of the Qur'ān and the 'histories' of the Prophet in verse or prose or a combination of both, the mawlid proper was accompanied by the dhikr circles which formed an integral part of the ritual of the Ṣūfī brotherhoods.

Detailed pictures of dhikr meetings are to be found in Zainab[3] and al-Ayyām.[4] Phrases of the religious formulae, the confession of faith, the repetition of the word 'Allāh' and His various

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1. Ibid., pp. 68-69.
2. Grünebaum, op. cit., p. 73. also see Baer, "Social Change in Egypt", in Political and Social Change in Modern Egypt, ed. P. M. Holt, p. 136 .
3. Haykal, Zainab, pp. 258-259.
4. Ṭāhā Ḥusain, al-Ayyām, Vol. I, pp. 91-92.

attributes are given; the accompanying relevant rythmical movements of head and body are described, enabling the reader to form an idea of the prevailing atmosphere. He gets the feeling that the attraction of such performances lies in the mixture of heightening of religious emotions and the production of a pleasant drowsiness, a kind of hypnotic state, which the performers enjoy.

The reader receives an unfavourable impression from Haykal and Ṭāhā Ḥusain of the mystical orders, the shuyūkh al-ṭuruq. A particularly good portrayal of them is made in Shajarat al-Bu's. Ṭāhā Ḥusain exposes with subtlety and sarcasm the influence and parasitic nature of these orders, and the importance they attach to their own person. We learn how those who confine themselves to 'religious' practices and strive to gain through a mystical attitude the reputation of a walī, subsist on alms and the generosity of the people who belong to or respect their order. Visits by them or their murīdīn are considered an honour bestowed on the host regardless of the financial burden such visits entail.[1]

The Shaikh on visiting Cairo, honours ʿAbd al-Raḥmān (a merchant) by becoming his guest. He has, however, to distribute his murīdīn on other families for they were more than one house could contain. But as ʿAbd al-Raḥmān has asked the Shaikh for dhikr meetings to be performed in his house he is obliged to prepare a feast for "scores of men every evening".[2] We are told that ʿAbd

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1. Ṭāhā Ḥusain, Shajarat al-Bu's, p. 63.
2. Ibid., pp. 62-63.

al-Raḥmān performs the duties of a generous host. Daily, he sends the servants he especially hired for the occasion, with breakfast for the Shaikh and his followers. Later in the day, all go to visit the dead "in their graves and the living in their homes".[1] After the noon-prayer they return and find lunch ready.

Ṭāhā Ḥusain with subtle sarcasm remarks that the Shaikh and his followers spent nothing on themselves throughout their long stay, for the Shaikh would not "tolerate any of his murīdīn to suffer financially while they were accompanying him."[2] The veneration in which the Shaikh is held is also stressed. His visitors are "men of position and none among them whatever his rank but sets aside his pride and proceeds humbly and with bent head to where the Shaikh is seated, kisses his hand and sits in the place the Shaikh indicates to him. Silence reigns, until the Shaikh starts the conversation.[3]

The 'methods' which the shuyūkh used to impress those present with their sanctity are not lost on Ṭāhā Ḥusain. He states how in the midst of an intimate conversation the Shaikh would suddenly stop, bow his head slightly, then come up with a ḥadīth which he would quote, after tracing it to the Prophet.[4]

Their influence on the daily life of those who respect them is considerable. Any good deed they perform has an ulterior motive.

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1. Ibid., p. 63.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p. 65.
4. Ibid.

The better paid job, the Shaikh advised Khālid to take in a certain town is in his own best interest, as it is the only town in the province to which he has no access. It never sent him gifts or a delegation, for it has a shaikh and an order of its own.[1] By transferring Khālid to that town, he (the Shaikh) gains a foothold there, and whenever he happens to pass that area he will be Khālid's guest.[2] Khālid's uneasiness about the move is brushed aside with the promise of a better salary and above all, the blessing of the Shaikh.[3]

Fatalism

Thirteen centuries of Islam have left their imprint on Egyptian manners and customs. Closely associated with the people's superstitious outlook is their fatalistic attitude. With Islam taking root in the country, it normalised the position of ruler and subject within the existing political and economic framework. The former's power was buttressed and the latter's condition came to be accepted contentedly as the inevitable. Resignation to one's lot, however bad, became the order of the day. Any effort at improving one's condition was rendered meaningless and futile. Man was provided with a powerful excuse for not exerting himself, since all was taken to be pre-ordained and determined by God. His intelligence could not be trusted to solve

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1. Ibid., pp. 125-126.
2. Ibid., p. 127.
3. Ibid., p. 132.

the problems he encountered, whether physical or social. He was not a free agent. Instead of rebelling against an injustice or being moved to indignation by the exactions of his masters, he accepted whatever ill befell him with patience. Patience in adversity was a virtue, rewarded by a better life in the hereafter. Al-ṣabr ṭayyib is one of many sayings advocating patience and which are still constantly repeated in twentieth century Egypt.

The viccissitudes of life were accepted and their burden was lightened by the belief in and use of such verses as "God is the best of providers"[1], or "He provides whom He wishes",[2] "endure that which has befallen you",[3] "to be patient is the better for you".[4] When ʿAlwānī, the watchman complains to ʿAbd al-Hādī in al-Ard of his earnings, which are so meagre that he cannot pay Shaikh Yūsuf, the shopkeeper, the small sum he owes him, ʿAbd al-Hādī calms him by stating that things "will straighten themselves out".[5] "How?" asks ʿAlwānī sadly, "and from where?"[6] "Things will get better ... eventually they'll get better"[7], came the reply. It is interesting to note that ʿAlwānī, the semi-settled bedwin, is ready to question the issue rather than leave it to providence as ʿAbd al-Hādī, the peasant, does.

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1. Qur'ān, Sūra, 62^{11}
2. Ibid., Sūra, 2^{212}
3. Ibid., Sūra, 3^{17}
4. Ibid., Sūra, 4^{24}
5. ʿA. R. al-Sharqāwī, al-Ard, p. 58.
6. Ibid., p. 58.
7. Ibid., p. 61.

Becoming all dependent on God and seeking refuge in Him whenever assailed by life's misfortunes, helped to soften the dreariness of everyday life of the masses, but produced a paralysing impact on their thinking and consequently their behaviour. It not only encourqged the 'freezing up' of bad conditions but led to mental indolence and lack of initiative. Conditioned for centuries to dismiss problems with the expedient and comforting phrase 'our Lord will solve it', the masses were rendered apathetic and were at a loss when on certain occasions they attempted to assert themselves and take matters into their own hands.

Ahlan wa Sahlan abounds in incidents which illustrate the confusion and helplessness of the people in any unaccustomed situation. In the following episode, the author indicates the negative influence the fatalistic attitude has on the people. ʿAbd al-Jalīl, the village school-master is terrified of the consequences of his allegations to the ʿumda about having read in a newspaper the news of the King's visit to Kafr Suhail. He knows full well that his claim is without foundation. His tongue was simply carried away in his wish to impress the village folk with his "wide knowledge". Now, on his way to Cairo, in the company of the ʿumda, who took the news seriously and decided to consult the knowledgable people as to how to act on such an important occasion, ʿAbd al-Jalīl feels the enormity of what he has done and tries to find an outlet.[1] He is soon tired of thinking and his anxiety finds

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1. Mu'nis, op. cit., pp.86-87.

refuge in the 'bustomary safety valve" which "exempts millions from working out the consequences: dependence on God, the rescuer from all difficulties."[1] He starts reciting verses from the Qur'ān, asking God to "guide the King to undertake the visit to Kafr Suhail."[2]

To think is the most difficult task for the 'umda of Kafr Suhail and the "one thing he cannot stand". Not accustomed to serious thinking he is at a loss on hearing the news of the King's impending visit to his village. Those around him are of no help either. On asking his brother for advice, the latter though an expert on devising murder, the burning of crops, or the poisoning of cattle, remains silent, "not knowing how to think."[3] The 'umda's reaction to diverse new situations during his short stay in Cairo is a delight to read. His ignorance is mixed with natural cunning. He is credulous and mistrustful, frightened and light-hearted, pious and profane. He represents the typical mental traits of the rural masses.

The harmful effect of this fatalistic attitude is evident in man's inability to consider problems facing him seriously and logically and consequently renders him incapable of intelligent planning. On the few occasions when attempts are made to work out a solution, ignorance and lack of experience frustrate the well-intentioned efforts. Such a situation is drawn for us in al-Ard. It takes the villagers a whole day, in which meaningless words are

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1. Ibid., p. 87.
2. Ibid., p. 88.
3. Ibid., p. 30.

reiterated and feelings run high, with a few almost coming to blows, before it is finally decided that Muḥammad Afandī, the teacher, shall write the petition. The commotion that ensues indicates the rarity of such occasions in the village community. The "white paper" has to be fetched from Muḥammad Afandī's house, the "pen and ink" Shaikh Yūsuf has to provide from his shop. As for the host Muḥammad Abū Swailem, in the courtyard of whose house the meeting is held, he lights lamp No. 10, a sign of the importance of the gathering. When the petition is written in "the style of al-Manfalūṭī", an indication of the erudition of the writer, those present are asked to put their signatures on it. The first to do so, are Shaikh Yūsuf, a former Azharite and the village shopkeeper,and Shaikh al-Shinnāwī, the village shaikh, The rest, illiterate, use their own seals or finger prints. The whole procedure is accompanied by the recitation of the Fātiḥa more than once, at the invitation of the Shaikh. Signed by all, the petition is ready to be taken to the 'umda and then to Maḥmūd Bey, the rich landowner, who will be entrusted with the mission of changing "the irrigation ration", by exerting his influence on the "government".[1] It never occurs to the villagers that he would be the last person to pursue the matter, despite the ten pounds Muḥammad Afandī pays him as a bribe.[2] His interests and theirs are diametrically opposed.

It is interesting to note that the character conceived by Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī in Ṣaḥḥ al-Nawm, to bring about the required reform in

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1. Ibid., p. 86.
2. Ibid., p. 142.

the 'village' is called the Ustādh. This man, having "studied and contemplated" for "long months", the ills of the village, finds that the treatment cannot be effective as long as the root is corrupt.[1] It is the spirit of humility and degradation, resignation to one's lot and the acceptance of tyranny[2] that fills the souls of the people. They prefer comfort and safety to struggle and adventure. In short, deficiency is in man himself, who does not act. In order to overcome this weakness, the teacher undertakes "to spread the sense of dignity and pride into the hearts of our people".[3] Instead of assuming the role of an educator whose aim is to develop character and intelligence, he resorts to the traditional authoritarian methods. He assumes the role of the instructor, the man who imparts information. Consequently the people of the village fail to realise his dream. They are asked to "shoulder the responsibility" yet no measures are taken to make them understand the situation and sense their duty. Nor are they given the chance to think independently or act on their own initiative when the occasion arises. Orders are issued from above and they have to carry them out without understanding the reason for doing so.[4] Moreover those orders do not indicate clear planning or profound thinking and are generally vague and indecisive.[5] It is not

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1. Ḥaqqī, Ṣaḥḥ al-Nawm, p. 84.
2. Ibid., p. 84.
3. Ḥaqqī, Ṣaḥḥ al-Nawm, p. 84.
4. Ibid., p. 84.
5. Ibid., p. 88.

surprising that the ignorant 'village' folk display helplessness, ineptitude and fear of responsibility whenever confronting a problem, however small.

Men of religion and the various brotherhoods promoted the crippling influence that belief in predestination and the providence of God had on men. Their preaching encouraged man to find solace, not in striving to better his lot, but in submission to the wisdom of God and his omnipotence. 'Alī the merchant in Shajarat al-Bu's is frightened of the ever increasing encroachment of modern stores into the town, threatening his livelihood and that of his fellow merchants. Lacking in knowledge and not accustomed to independent thinking, he is at a loss to know how to confront these new "devils who take what there is of money in the town".[1] In his dilemma he and his friends turn to the Shaikh as the only knowledgable person whose superior power will direct them to a solution. The Shaikh reminds them of God's infinite wisdom and starts preaching to them the evils of wealth and the attractions of poverty. He emphasises his point by indicating that most inhabitants of Paradise are from the poor, whilst the majority of those in Hell, are the rich who hoard gold and silver and do not spend it in God's cause. He ends his statement with part of a verse from the Qur'ān, "bring them tidings of bitter agony."[2]

Shaikh al-Shinnāwī, in al-Ard interprets any problem of the peasants in terms of punishment or reward from God. The

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1. Tāhā Ḥusain, Shajarat al-Bu's, p. 48.
2. Ibid., p. 48.

government's arbitrary order of limiting the 'irrigation days' and consequently, its drastic effects on the livelihood of the peasants, are justified by the Shaikh as an indication of God's wisdom. He cursed the village for disobeying Him just as He had cursed 'Ād and Thamūd.[1] He keeps reminding the depressed and worried peasants that "God is able to let water fall from the sky, thus bringing life to the land."[2] When it happens that a peasant objects to such an explanation or passive attitude, verses of "the torment and fire" and endless 'traditions' describibg hell, pour from the Shaikh's mouth, denouncing the 'disbeliever' and suppressing any further query or comment.[3]

Throughout the novel, Shaikh al-Shinnāwī offers the writer a unique opportunity to criticise the shortcomings of this type of shaikhs He exposes their ignorance in matters of religion, their humbug and their dependence on the will of the ruling class ('umdas and landlords), failing in their duty towards the peasant's physical and moral well being. Traits for which the needy are censured call for praise in the rich. Khadra the 'loose' girl of the village is found dead. It is suggested by one of the peasants that the Shaikh should bury her in his graveyard. He is furious at such a request, and refuses to "contaminate the bones of the dead with Khadra's corpse, she who has lived in sin".[4]

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1. Qur'ān, Sūra, 7^{70}, 69^{4}.
2. al-Sharqāwī, op. cit., p. 88.
3. Ibid., p. 89.
4. Ibid., p. 214.

ʿAbd al-Hādī, the peasant, draws the Shaikh's attention to the fact that on a previous occasion, he had no objection - after receiving £E2 from Ihsān Hānim - to reciting the Fātiha over her dead relatives and calling on God to "increase her wealth", knowing full well that the 'lady' in question had been no less than a professional prostitute in Cairo. The Shaikh reacts vehemently. He is about to strike ʿAbd al-Hādī, shouting at him that the latter is not like Khadra for "God has forgiven her. She gave alms and held dhikr meetings, celebrated the Prophet's birthday and offered money to the mosque."[1] However, ʿAbd al-Hādī is not impressed and he wonders which of the two women is really the more sinful: The one who does wrong for "the sake of a morsel", or the other "who sells wine ... in order to wear gold? ... the gold which will enable her to have a palace and a garden in Paradise!"[2] Confused and silenced, the Shaikh resorts to his customary weapon, the stick, and accuses ʿAbd al-Hādī of being a disbeliever.[3]

The Shaikh's shallow and limited outlook is evident in his superficial judgement of whatever the villagers do in terms of halāl and harām. ʿAlwānī', the hard up watchman, is threatened by the Shaikh with hell fire for having stolen a few maize cobs while he is trying to 'pay' for the debt he owes the shopkeeper. "Hell!" repeats ʿAlwānī indifferently, "do you think I fear hell? Is it going to be worse than that which I am living in now? Do you think

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1. Ibid., pp. 215-216.
2. Ibid., p. 216.
3. Ibid., p. 216.

I have found a legal way to make a living and discarded it for the love of doing wrong? Stop talking about right and wrong."[1]

Al-Ard is one of the very few novels in which characters representing the masses no longer submit contentedly to their lot.[2] Resignation is undermined by a new spirit which though yet vague and undefined drives man to fight for his rights. Methods are crude, and planning is naive, because of lack of experience, ignorance and oppression. But it is the spirit behind the action which indicates a new attitude to life.[3] This note of defiance raised against authority is a welcome change from the traditional apathy and unquestioning acceptance of a situation. Even men of religion can no longer exert their total influence on the villagers. Their interpretation of 'God's wisdom' does not go unchallenged.[4] It is the peasant's awareness of his condition that marks the first step towards liberation.

This 'new spirit' is the more remarkable when society's attitude to change is taken into consideration. "Society', writes von Grünebaum, 'is prepared to applaud only such change as will restore the simpler, better conditions of earlier times when contact with the Lord was more immediate and more intimate."[5] In other words,"retrogression is encouraged instead of progress and

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1. Ibid., p. 236.
2. Ibid., pp. 75, 67, 318, 249.
3. Ibid., p. 75.
4. Ibid., p. 75.
5. G. von Grünebaum, Medieval Islam (2nd. ed. Chicago, 1953), pp. 240-241.

staganation is cultivated, but the ensuing sterility deplored as another piece of evidence of the increasing weakness of man."[1]

The Effect of Weaknesses in Egyptian Education on the Analysis of Situations and in Characterization

Criticism of education in Egypt constantly complains of its "unfruitful ness", of its failure to "disseminate the social spirit and feeling of responsibility in the individual", and its inability to prepare the human being for "struggle in the area of practical life."[2] An analysis of the novels under study clearly reveals the weaknesses inherent in Egyptian education. Surprising is the immense influence this education had in moulding the authors' outlook and attitude to life. However one has always to bear in mind that the present system of education bears the stamp and characteristics of past Egyptian culture and reflects the particular historical conditions through which it passed.

The abstract nature of education,[3] its divorce from the needs of Egyptian society, has had grave consequences. When a topic called "Some Diseases of the Society" is taught independent of the Egyptian physical environment, the result is "that national social problems are taken for granted as if they were necessary conditions

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1. Ibid., p. 241.
2. See Radwan, op. cit., pp. 120-121.
3. Radwan, op. cit., p. 125.

from which the people had to suffer ... (or) to assume that these social conditions come from Heaven, not from social forces."[1] Consequently no indignation is felt at the spectacle of a backward, corrupt and exploited Egypt.

It is evident from the general atmosphere of the novels, that their writers are on the whole unaware of the social forces working around them, influencing the relationship between one individual and another and between them and their environment. Rarely do they seek to see the connection between cause and effect. The search for the "why" is almost non-existent. Where bad conditions are exposed and denounced, the exposition does not reflect insight into the matter. It does not probe deep enough to disclose the social reality. Thus denunciation falls on both victim and exploiter indiscriminately. Pity is felt for the oppressed but the oppressors are not condemned. (e.g. Ard al-Nifāq, ʿAwdat al-Rūḥ Yawmiyyāt Nā'ib, Zainab).

The detachment of the information gained at school and/or university renders the students (in our case the writers) incapable of grasping the complexities of the contemporary reality. There is a tendency to oversimplification. This in turn leads to wrong or superficial assumptions and conclusions. The following example illustrates this point. The overthrow of the old régime in 1952 was taken to indicate the destruction of the old order with all its evils and vices. The coup d'état was announced as 'a revolution'. In this

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1. Ibid., p. 126.

self-named revolution the 'word' took on the meaning of a social upheaval. Imagined reality was substituted for actuality. Opinions, verdicts and decisions were all based on this assumption, Najīb Maḥfūẓ (not a unique case), in 1962, explaining the reason for his transition to what the critics call the "third phase", in his literary career said, "My books were an attempt at analysing and criticising the old society. When that society collapsed I found myself in the situation of one searching for new values from which to draw inspiration. For art after a revolution - any revolution - must change from what it was before. Had I continued criticising the old society as some of my colleagues do I should have repeated myself and done so without enthusiasm."[1]

Building absolute verdicts on assumptions and first impressions rarely indicates a deep approach to life, or an understanding of the forces at work. Maḥfūẓ's statements require a number of qualifications. Were the political break much more violent, people (including writers) would not be transformed overnight, as if by magic into a new society. Nor are deeply rooted problems eliminated by mere government decrees or pronouncements. It is evident in any novel in which a political question is referred to or discussed, that its author lacks the understanding of politico-economic dynamics. If and when changes occur they are seen in terms of miracles, rather than as an

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1. al-Masā' al-Usbū'ī, (Cairo, 21st October 1962), quoted by al-Sharūnī, in al-Riwāya wal-Qiṣṣa al-Qaṣīra, p. 21.

inevitable result of historical developments.[1] The "teacher" in Sahh al-Nawm is seen as "a miracle worker". It is he who "awakens" the "village" as if by a magic wand. They woke up we are told, because the mountain oppressing their chests had been moved suddenly, "burst like a bubble".[2] The few characters who are presented as struggling for a better Egypt are often themselves surprised when a certain development takes place. What is worse, is their belief that their task ends there and then. "On the whole our responsibility ends here",[3] says Mahmūd, the student of medicine after the coup d'état (1952). He has taken part in the struggle against the British and the King "so as not to live the life of slaves". For "the army is the responsible one today". He sees the "revolution" as a "help from heaven" relieving him from the burden "of confronting life with its cruelty".[4] Yet only a few months earlier in his letters to his sister, from the Canal Zone, he relates the "isolation" of those who struggle, to the apathy of the people in general, "those people who do not love Egypt with arms and blood" but with their "hearts and mouths",[4] and only so long as this love does not clash with their own interests. He condemns them as the

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1. Tāhā Husain in Naqd wa Iṣlāḥ observes that proper knowledge of facts and conditions would not lead to such an interpretation. T. Husain, Naqd wa Iṣlāḥ, p. 140.
2. Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī, Sahh al-Nawm, p. 107.
3. L. al-Zayyāt, al-Bāb al-Maftūḥ, p. 155.
4. Ibid., p. 101.

"real traitors".[1] Apparently, author and character condemn the indifference and insincerety of the middle class. Nevertheless, statements that indicate a more realistic attitude towards happenings, instead of the traditional explanation in terms of 'miracles', are of little value. A somewhat less shallow understanding of the issue is when Mahmūd remarks that the miracle will happen "when we shall be able to protect the Canal and all our national gains, and when we abandon our passiveness."[2] However, the social implications of becoming "able" and "active" are not taken into consideration and developed. Ḥusain, Mahmūd's more mature and patriotic friend declaring that one's responsibility towards one's country never ends, is deprived of the chance to prove it. He is conveniently whisked off to Germany on a scholarship and returns just in time to take part in the Suez War (1956). His love for his country is represented in defending it against an aggressor. The complicated process necessary for an enduring achievement is absent. The claims of nationalism overcome social demands.[3]

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1. It is relevant to point out that "the enthusiasm of the Arab, for an enterprise that he launches is disproportionate to his readiness and ability to effectuate it. There is far more talk than positive action and sustaining a course of work. The Middle East: A Political and Economic Survey (2nd ed.; London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1954), pp. XVI, XVII. Ibid., p. 101.

2. Ibid., p. 306.

3. "They (the students) have not shown in the struggle for social reform and economic productivity the same qualities they exhibited in the more dramatic battle for independence and democratic rule". Radwan, op. cit., p. 12 .

Stress is on small items, while the main and essential parts are disregarded. Day to day problems and their tactical solutions are present but there is an inability to discover a rational pattern in the multiplicity of facts. Life and the universe are viewed "as a series of static, concrete and disjunct entities, loosely linked in a sort of mechanical or even casual association by circumstances or the mind of an individual, but having no organic interrelation of their own".[1] The following examples will illustrate this point. Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm draws the picture of a peasant child inside a room competing with a calf for the cow's udder. The scene is described as one of "unsurpassed beauty and great meaning".[2] There is no indication of the neglect, filth and poverty which such a scene implies. A similar view is taken of the peasants. He sees them filled with the joy of life, singing gayly "as if celebrating the birth of the sun".[3] Their backs bent for hours, scorched by that same sun while harvesting the fields for somebody else's benefit has escaped his notice. Sharing the same room with their beasts is explained as "deep understanding of life".[4] The author is blissfully unconscious of the miserable life the peasants lead. Their real condition and their state of mind altogether elude him.

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1. Bernard Lewis, The Arabs in History (London, 1950), p. 140.
2. Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm, 'Audat al-Rūḥ, vol. II pp. 29-30.
3. Ibid., vol. II, pp. 37-38.
4. Ibid., p. 54.

The majority of characters in the novels suffer from a similar lack of insight and an 'atomistic' outlook. Society is conceived "not as an organic whole compounded of interrelated and interacting parts but as an association of separate groups ... held together only by the ground beneath and the governments above."[1] In a conversation touching upon the condition of the people, the three friends, all university students in their final year, declare poverty to be the major problem. Ma'mūn Raḍwān is sure that only religion can solve it. "Islam is the healer of all our pains"[2], he states and leaves it at that. The methods through which Islam could provide a satisfactory answer are not discussed. The "radical" ʿAlī Ṭāhā, sets his hopes on "government and parliament". His attention is drawn by their third friend, Maḥjūb, to the conflict between the interests of the government and parliament and those of the people. ʿAlī dismisses Maḥjūb's objection to "his solution" and points out that "parliament is a lake in which streams of different sources flow and meet", and that it is "inevitable that their waters will mix and a new source will emerge."[3]

The trilogy abounds in examples which illustrate the inability of the 'educated' characters to grasp the dynamic interaction of social life, a further indication of that divorce between mere acquisition of information and the understanding of life in its

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1. B. Lewis, op. cit., p. 142.
2. Maḥfūẓ, al-Qāhira al-Jadīda, p. 45.
3. Ibid., p. 46.

comprehensiveness and depth. Importance is attached to the letter, not the meaning involved or the spirit behind it. As such it stands for true knowledge and further blurs and distorts a person's judgement. Kamāl contemplating the meaning of his birthday believes he is thinking with a "new mind". His assumption is based on the fact that "he drank from the spring of the material philosophy" and thus came to know in "two months" the outcome of humanity's thinking in a century.[1] There is no evidence of the impact of that philosophy or any other accumulated in a similar fashion, either on Kamāl's outlook or understanding of social complexities. What there is, does not go beyond the repetition of certain definitions, expressions and terms, generally irrelevant to the course of events.[2] Such an attitude to knowledge reflects the 'atomistic' outlook of the Arabs in general (exemplified here in Kamāl) where the "various disciplines are not different ways of reaching out towards the same heart, pooling their findings in an integrated whole, but separate and self-contained compartments, each holding a finite number of pieces of knowledge, the progressive accumulation of which constitutes learning."[3]

This outlook is a severe handicap in the creation of characters who could lay any claim at universality. It renders the authors incapable of reflecting the whole of society in a particular part

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1. Maḥfūẓ, Qaṣr al-Shawq, p. 424.
2. Ibid., pp. 157-158 and 310-311.
3. B. Lewis, op. cit., p. 142.

by way of concrete relationships between characters whose personal fate has been raised to the level of the typical. One looks in vain for characters in whom a whole way of life is epitomized. The following example from volume three of the trilogy serves to illustrate how universality cannot be achieved when the characters' outlook is restricted to the narrow boundaries of locality, baseless assumptions and generalisations. The two friends, Riyāḍ Quldus and Kamāl, both "liberal thinkers", are discussing the situation in Egypt in the light of the latest developments between the Palace and the Cabinet. Riyāḍ, highly excited, remarks that the constitutional crisis ended in the defeat of the people.[1] This verdict is based on the belief that the dismissal of Naḥḥās is identical with the people's defeat in their struggle with the Palace. A better knowledge of the economic political and social implications of the issue would have shown him that the interests of the masses could not be identified with those of al-Naḥḥās and the Wafd party.[2] But neither he nor Kamāl seem to be aware of the conflict of the two interests. The latter agrees with his friend, regretting that the new King (Farūq) is no different from his father. The whole question is seen in relation to persons, not fundamental issues.

In linking the problems of the peasants in al-Ard, with the

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1. Maḥfūẓ, al-Sukkariyya, p. 174.

2. The Wafd included members of all classes of society among its followers. Its leaders consisted mainly of landowners and members of the petty bourgeoisie who had worked their way up through the law or politics, while some important financiers were among its backers. See Issawi, Egypt at Mid-Century, p. 261.

political crisis and the political struggle during Ṣidqī's premiership (1930-1934) al-Sharqāwī has achieved comparatively stronger and deeper insight than by the previous method of reporting on village life. However, the peasants' discontent and suppression are not developed in the context of class struggle. The rich landowners and the powerful men in authority are criticised and condemned because they belong to Ṣidqī's party not because they represent an exploiting group, regardless of the party and its leaders.[1]

Passages and episodes in the various novels strike the reader with the familiarity and locality of the information they impart. There is almost no gleam of the possibility of another attitude to life. It is as if the brain cannot effectually conceive any idea "that is outside the narrow range of its experience and tradition, nor can it meet any situation which deviates from the path traced by routine."[2] This fact is most evident in the portrayal of women. The traditional concept of woman's role and nature has hardly changed. In most cases she is still regarded an object "a commodity" rather than a human being. Rarely is there the realization that woman can have outward as well as purely family interests.

The omission of large segments of society by the novelists could be explained in terms of the traditional outlook and weaknesses in the system of education. Children suffer almost total neglect.

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1. ʿA. R. al-Sharqāwī, al-Ard, pp. 97-1000.

2. H.A.R. Gibb and H. Bowen, Islamic Society and the West (London, 1950), p. 216.

With the exception of al-Ayyām and al-Saqqā Māt, in which the reader is introduced to a child's outlook and upbringing, little attention is paid to children. Their coming into the world is not regarded a problem, no matter how poor the parents are. Economic and social factors undoubtedly govern this attitude besides the influence of Islam in connection with reproduction.[1] Regrettable is the writers complete silence on a crying evil such as child labour.[2]

Workers do not appear to have made any impact on the authors either, despite the fact that they were in the news after the First World War. Their emergence as a new force in society and its implications went unquestioned. When a worker is presented, the reader learns nothing about him as an individual belonging to and representing a certain 'class'. His thoughts, his work, his relationship with his employer are not touched upon. He is just a character who is given the epithet of worker.[3]

There are more student characters than workers in the novels. But there is little sign of students' poverty and their sexual problems. Moreover, the reader is left in darkness concerning university life and the atmosphere prevailing there. In al-Ayyām, Ṭāhā Ḥusain gives us the only full picture of an 'academic' institution, that of al-Azhar. He shows how the system works,[4]

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1. Qur'ān, Sūra 4^{151}; 17^{31}; 62^{11}. The Qur'ān declared that parents should not kill their children for fear of destitution, for "We will provide for you and them."
2. See Issawi, Egypt at Mid-Century, pp. 172, 241; Ayrout, op. cit., p. 126; H. ʿAmmār, Growing up in an Egyptian Village, pp. 26-33.
3. Maḥfūẓ, Zuqāq al-Midaqq pp. 42, 107.
4. Ṭ. Ḥusain, al-Ayyām, vol. I, pp. 140. 150; vol. II, pp. 71, 73, 101-103, 118.

the courses offered, the method of teaching, the authoritarian and uninspiring transmission of texts,[1] by equally unimaginative shaikhs with a conventional outlook and often very limited knowledge and understanding.[2]

In al-Bāb al-Maftūḥ, we have an indication of the segregation of the sexes in Cairo University[3] and a successful portrait of the vain rigid university professor in the person of Dr. Ramzī. In al-Bāb al-Maftūḥ and Bain al-Qaṣrain, students are depicted taking part in the national struggle. Fahmī, the law student, in the 1919 demonstrations[4], and Maḥmūd, the medical student, in the 1951[5] unrest in the Canal Zone. Neither character shows a profound understanding of the situation, though both are sincere in their attitudes.

The intellectual range of the students portrayed is very limited and their personal culture low. Discussions, comments, criticisms are empty of thoughts. Ideas about religion or philosophy are not their own, but borrowed. Political events are reported at length, interpreted and combined in an undisciplined or illogical manner. Similarly inconsistencies seem to possess them on occasions when social questions are discussed.[6] The most significant aspect

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1. Ibid., vol. II, pp. 79, 114, 115.
2. Ibid., vol. I, p. 144; vol. II, pp. 79, 98.
3. L. al-Zayyāt, op. cit., pp. 207-209.
4. Maḥfūẓ, Bain al-Qaṣrain, pp. 483-488, 565-570.
5. L. al-Zayyat, op. cit., pp. 101, 132-133.
6. Maḥfūẓ, al-Qāhira al-Jadīda, p. 168; Bidāya wa Nihāya, p. 175. al-Sukkariyya, pp. 309-310; Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī, Ṣaḥḥ al-Nawm, pp. 111, 106-9.

of this mental poverty is the sudden change of subject whenever a crucial point is reached in a discussion or conversation.[1]

The students reflect to a great extent their authors' own limited horizons. The absence of any concrete system in the novelists' social thought, or any specific philosophy of life renders the characters full of contradictory and conflicting attitudes, which in the final analysis is no attitude at all.[2]

In view of the weaknesses in the education system and the large number[3] of illiterate people in the country, a profound interest in the question of education is expected. But apart from Ṭāhā Ḥusain in al-Ayyām, and Ṭāhir Lāshīn in Ḥawwā' bilā Ādam, the question is neglected. Both writers emphasise the importance of education in general and the need for a "vocational education"[4] is stressed by the latter. The juxtaposition of the enlightened and rational Ḥawwā' with her ignorant and superstitious grandmother is admirably handled.[5] In the rest of the novels the question is not considered beyond its significance as a means for getting a government post, thereby receiving a steady income and social distinction. This is in line with the concept of education and the values prevailing in Egyptian society.

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1. L. al-Zayyāt, op. cit., p. 82-83, 157.
2. Maḥfūẓ, al-Sukkariyya, pp. 124, 175, 250; and others.
3. According to Ayrout illiterates in villages rate as high as 85 per cent (1963), Ayrout, op. cit., p. 126. A fair estimate for the whole country would be 75 per cent. "Admin. and Social Conditions" Encyclopaedia Britannica, (vol. VIII, p. 83.)
4. Ṭ. Lāshīn, Ḥawwā' bilā Ādam, pp. 50-51.

Notable is the importance attached to non-essentials. Appearances govern the outlook and behaviour of the characters. Human beings and various aspects of life are not judged by what they are, but what they appear to represent. As a large number of characters represent the middle and lower middle classes, the stress is upon security and prosperity and upon the all-important power of money. Maḥjūb in al-Qāhira al-Jadīda voices the aspiration of the lower middle class on being admitted into the smart set. "This is real life ... life which satisfies all the instincts."[1] A person's worth is relative to his wealth and the position he occupies. Ability, understanding, loyalty and dedication are qualities of little value. They would not weigh in the possesors' favour.[2] Scruples are overcome in the quest for an improved status. Moral codes are defied and methods however dishonourable are adopted to obtain money.[3] Wealth and/or rank is respected and few questions asked as to how the former or latter is gained. Too much value is placed on university degrees. Title worship is almost a disease gripping both rich and poor. The former spend large amounts of money in order to become 'titled', the latter shamelessly humble themselves in front of the titled. Emphasis is on respectability. Characters are concerned with keeping up a constant role of well-being. Shallow pretentions and striving for effect (Ḥasanain in Bidāya wa Nihāya is a brilliant example) dominate the behaviour of most characters.

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1. Maḥfūẓ, al-Qāhira al-Jadīda, p. 93.
2. Ibid., pp. 81, 84-86, 99, 101.
3. Ibid., pp. 111, 174-175.

Judging respectability as "the pillar of every hope in life", the scene between the two brothers Ḥasan and Ḥasanain, exposes the values of the lower middle class. It is also one of the best scenes written by Maḥfūẓ. Ḥasanain, having become an officer, and in love with the uniform that symbolises his new status, goes to see Ḥasan, the black sheep of the family in order to persuade him to "start a new honourable life".[1] "In virtue of my dishonourable life was I able to ward off hunger from our family and offer your brother Ḥusain what he needed so that he could take up his government job, and provide you with the required fees which made you into an officer, thank God",[2] replies Ḥasan, controlling his anger. He is not taken in by Ḥasanain's apparent concern for his life. "Don't worry about me ... I mean don't worry about yourself or your reputation ... Do not heed what people say about our family because of me. You can live the life you fancy in spite of people's gossip."[3] In a final attempt to bring his brother round to his point of view he provokes Ḥasan beyond endurance. "A decent life! A decent life! Do not repeat this phrase to me, it makes me sick. Do you want me to be a mechanic earning a few piastres a day? Is this the decent life? ... had I stuck to it all my life your shoulder would not have been decorated with this star. Do you imagine it is only my life which is not decent? ...What a deluded officer you are. Your life is no better ... I made you an officer with illegal money ... You owe your uniform

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1. Maḥfūẓ, Bidāya wa Nihāya, p. 292.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., pp.293-294.

to this prostitute (he pointed at a picture) and to drugs. If you really wish me to give up my tarnished life, it is only fair that you too should give up yours. So take off your uniform and let us start an honourable life together."[1]

The general atmosphere of the novels does not reflect a radical difference in outlook among the novelists, or between them and the outlook of their characters. Though a few condemn "outworn traditions and old customs" one cannot detect a desire for complete freedom from historical and traditional restraints. Most novels suffer from the influence tradition had and still has in moulding the novelists' outlook and their attitude to life, an influence mainly derived from tradition's association with ideas steeped in religion. Inherent are the Islamic principles of predestination and fatalism. Consciously or unconsciously everything is referred to God who is the primary cause of any idea, action, or thing. Notable is the lack of initiative, the discouragement of exertion, the little value placed on work. Evident too is the lack of curiosity shown about life and its happenings. Everything is taken as it comes. The future does not worry the characters or authors. There are no dreamers and no dreams of a future different from the one portrayed. The view of what can be done for society is very limited. Characters have no big goals to look forward to and work for. Their aims are limited and often trivial. Characters on the whole lack spirit and drive. A few talk about the necessity to improve conditions, but their words are not translated into deeds. There is a tendency to

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1. Ibid., p. 294.

underrate the capabilities of Man or exaggerate his smallest effort. Most striking is the little respect shown for the human being. Only in the novels of Ṭāhā Ḥusain does the discerning reader sense a respect for Man and the annoyance of the author with a society which attaches no value to life or the human being.

From what has preceded one can draw the conclusion that the novelists with the exception of one or two have left much to be desired, concerning almost the worst of all Egypt's evils, namely ignorance. The suffering and fears of the masses, their inability to play a creative role in social life and their submissiveness to fate instead of contributing to the making of their own destiny, are themes strangely absent from the novels. This absence reflects a grave limitation on the part of the novelists. As writers depicting society it is incumbent on them to observe man and his activities very carefully. Moreover to understand the fundamental processes at work in the Egyptian society a basic knowledge of the social, economic and political sciences is imperative. The lack of such a knowledge in addition to a limited experience in general has deprived them of the essential equipment necessary for any work of art exercising a commanding and enlightening effect on the readers.

In not being able to add to the knowledge or experience of the ordinary layman through their writings, they cannot claim any superiority in understanding basic life issues, or a greater awareness of and sensitiveness to social problems. Evident in their writings is the common traditional outlook, the tendency to over-simplify, overestimate and over excite, in addition to an

unwholesome interest in form rather than content, appearances rather than essentials.

Only through a new concept of education can a richer pattern of social life be brought about. This could be achieved by freeing the younger generation of Egypt from "the grip of the outmoded ways of life and thought" and by "building in them a habit of scientific thinking."[1]

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1. The social role of education can hardly be exaggerated. The quality of education given to a people shapes in the long run their character and destiny. See Radwan, op. cit., pp. 9, 159.

C O N C L U S I O N

In studying the social problems in Egypt as depicted by the Egyptian novelists from 1919-1960, the contents of the novels have been examined in the light of the relevant historical evidence on social conditions in the country during that period and the author's capability in presenting them has been assessed.

Any writer who depicts the conflicts, problems and development of society and who wishes to render a true picture of the people, their speech, manner, and attitude, whichever class they belong to, must needs be adept as a social and political thinker and no less skilful as a novelist. From conclusions reached in earlier chapters, it is hardly necessary to state that none of the novelists of this period attain to this ideal. However, it is interesting to notice that the most outstanding novelists in Egypt are those who have devoted a considerable part of their work to the portrayal of society.

Despite earlier attempts at establishing the novel, it came to be accepted as a respectable literary genre only after the Second World War, chiefly because a number of writers concentrated on it as a vehicle of expression. Also relevant to the greater success of the novel at that time were the advances in popular education and the growth of the reading public. The increase in the number of cultural magazines and the change in the discouraging attitude the press had shown the pioneer novelists added to its popularity.

The trend to 'realism' led to the acceptance of the social novel in literary circles and by the ordinary reader as well. The relation between technical accuracy and the social implications of the novels became evident. The greater the writer's knowledge of actuality, the deeper his experience and effective involvement in the world around him, the more profound his understanding of the various conflicting and intertwined social factors involved, the more sophisticated was his technique as a novelist.

Curiously enough, the 1952 coup d'etat seems to have caught the novelists completely unawares. This is borne out to some extent by the fact that until 1960 only three novels dealing with society after 1952 appeared (Lā Tuṭfi' al-Shams, Sahh al-Nawm and al-Bāb al-Maftūh). From the mid-fifties onwards, there has been an obvious tendency to treat contemporary (i.e. post 1952) questions in short story form rather than in the novel. Writers may have found it easier to follow up the quick development of events in the short story, where the focus in time and space can be easily restricted. The temptation to earn money more easily and acquire a reputation more quickly cannot be excluded. The writing of novel requires a far wider range of sympathy, and greater imagination, patience and concentration than the average writer possesses.

It is more disappointing that some prominent novelists such as Maḥfūẓ should believe that their task in depicting social conditions and evils has ended with the collapse of the old and the promise of reform by the new régime, thus revealing their

failure to understand that social problems persist in different forms. This raises the fundamental question of the correctness of their conception of the issue. Their failure to envisage the 'future' indicates a lack of insight in dealing with the 'past'. None of them seems to have apprehended the magnitude or even the nature of the social wrongs which led to the change of regime. No strong political sense is displayed by most of them. They do not seem aware of the vital interflow between the private and the public life, the recognition of the necessary connections between the individual destiny and that of the community. This approach obscured the real issue: the basic defects of the politico-economic structure.

On looking below the surface of the novelists' writings, one is struck by their lack of knowledge about the way things really happen. They show little sense in their novels of any underlying cause in the system for the persistence and spread of the social problems. On the whole, things are seen in the way a casual onlooker sees them, the outward appearance, the surface of things. Rarely is a process described.

Social sensitiveness is exhibited to a considerable degree in the works of Ṭāhā Ḥusain, Ṭāhir Lāshīn, al-Sharqāwī, Laṭīfa al-Zayyāt and in two of al-Sibā'ī's novels, where human misery and/or social wrong are presented with some bitterness. Maḥfūz, Ḥaqqī, Mu'nis, Idrīs have a less bitter attitude. The spirit of defiance evident in Iḥsān's novels Anā Ḥurra, Lā Tuṭfi' al-Shams and al-Sharqāwī's al-Arḍ denotes a greater degree of political sensitivity.

No discussion of the social novels as a source of information for the condition of society can avoid considering the effect of humour in the presentation of situations and characters. Egyptians are humorous by nature and inclined to resort to humour in explaining any issue. This behaviour is reflected in the novelists, where humour is often used in the presentation of tragic situations and appalling conditions. Very important in trying to interpret the novelists' use of humour is the distinction that has to be kept in mind between humour as an effective weapon and humour as merely an Egyptian characteristic exhibited in the novel. In other words, is it a question of perceiving the ridiculous, the comical in a serious situation and effectively giving expression to it, or of regarding the whole situation as a joke? The lack of indignation against social wrongs and human misery, in most novels, puts the writers' seriousness in question. For a humorous approach consciously or unconsciously exercised detracts from the serious effect the writer may have wished to produce. It is well to raise a laugh, but when it takes the reader's mind off a serious point, the result is mere entertainment. Moreover, humour, irony and sarcasm are of great effect for the serious reader in a serious-minded society. But in a society where humour, apathy and evasion accorded with a traditionally fatalistic outlook, it is questionable whether a humorous style in depicting fundamental and urgent issues can be effective in conveying a message or rousing the public conscience. From observations throughout this study,

it can fairly be concluded that humour and cynicism in Egypt work upon the reader as an antidote to indignation, and that satire provides him with a kind of relief, thus blinding him to the real situation.

The attitude of the novelists towards poverty, i.e. the ill-distribution of wealth, one of the most important socio-economic problems, could be summarized as follows:

Against the background of an extremely unequal distribution of wealth (where 4 per cent received 32 per cent of the gross national income and 87 per cent received 27 per cent of that income[1]) based on an extensive exploitation of the majority by a small minority - especially in the pre-1952 era - in a chronically poor society of whom 70 per cent are peasants using agricultural methods several centuries old the general attitude of the Egyptian novelists ranges from semi-indifference to pity, sympathy and charity.

The case of the landless oppressed peasantry is slightly touched upon by Haykal, their appalling conditions exposed with bourgeois pity by al-Ḥakīm, and a more realistic portrayal of them is given by Idrīs. Al-Sharqāwī is distinguished from the rest by a more radical approach. Though his ideas lack concreteness and are not fully crystalysed, he implicitly advocates a rebellious stand. The peasants ought to struggle for their rights. For the

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1. C. Issawi, Egypt in Revolution, p. 120.

urban poor, charity and benevolence are advocated by al-Sibāʿī.

It is very disappointing that poverty with its well-known and obvious consequences in Egypt was not made an issue. Malnutrition, insanitary housing conditions, landless and jobless peasants, urban men and women with no specific employment, chronic diseases, ancient agricultural methods and implements, crime and degradation, abandoned children in Egypt's big cities, domestic servants, all aspects of the prevailing poverty were rarely satisfactorily exposed. Still less was a scientific approach adopted and an attempt made to identify the underlying causes of such conditions or the possible remedies for them suggested. Some of these aspects are mentioned as part of the description of the environment. Only in the case of al-Sibāʿī are they attacked. But his attack does not show an understanding of the fundamental cause. He does not realize that the poverty that has aroused his anger is the outcome of the socio-political and economic system.

It seems that corruption has aroused the interest of the social novelists of Egypt to a degree much greater than the ill-distribution of wealth. As a poor and ancient society, with restrictive traditions, several centuries of political suppression and economic exploitation, frequent cultural invasions and an ever-changing foreign ruling élite, Egypt constituted an environment very favourable to corruption in the administrative machinery and all other institutions.

Favouritism, nepotism, bribery, the abuse of power by superiors, humiliating submission by subordinates (beginning with the head of

the state and ending with the masses) opportunism and the farce of the political parties are among the most conspicuous aspects of corruption in Egypt. The novelists have depicted them clearly and vividly with a sense of involvement in several novels. (Yawmiyyāt Nā'ib, al-Qāhira al-Jadīda, Bidāya wa Nihāya, Hawwā'bilā Ādam, al-Ard, Ahlan wa Sahlan, Ard al-Nifāq and al-ʿAib.)

There is hardly a novel which does not refer to, depict or criticise some kind of corrupt behaviour or corrupt official. One might well wonder about the unusual keenness of the authors on such a social evil. This interest could be explained to some extent by the writers' direct involvement in their capacity as government officials who in one way or another had direct knowledge of it, and had personally suffered from this wide-spread ill.

However, the adequacy of the exposure of corruption as a prevalent practice is not matched with an equally adequate disclosure of its causes. When it is depicted it is hardly related to its real root, politico-economic exploitation aided by closed social traditions.

The third major problem, women or the position of woman in society, has been treated differently by the novelists. She is ignorant, (illiteracy among women is about 90 per cent) economically dependent on man - though of economic usefulness in the rural area - exploited, segregated, her social status governed by religion and religious traditions, several centuries old, in a polygamous society, insecure in family life, because of the possibility of being superseded by a competitor, or of an unexpected

divorce easily accomplished by the husband's verbal declaration and with no freedom to choose her partner in life; in short, she is subject to the control of the male members of the extended family.

With the exception of Lāshīn, Ṭāhā Ḥusain, ʿAbd al-Quddūs and Laṭīfa al-Zayyāt in Ḥawwā'bilā Ādam, Shajarat al-Bu's and Duʿā' al-Karawān Anā Ḥurra and al-Bāb al-Maftūḥ, respectively, the Egyptian novelists treat the question of woman as a natural phenomenon and scarcely hint at the need for a determined struggle to change her conventional position. This attitude seems strange when we recall that the emancipation of women was raised as a vital issue by dedicated reformers such as Qāsim Amīn and Luṭfī al-Sayyid, from the turn of the century. The novelists failed to see their responsibility in furthering the cause of woman's emancipation. It is disappointing to find woman depicted in many of the novels as an object of pleasure, concerned only with sex, intrigue and reproduction. The sensual aspects of woman, her life and relations with man, occupy most of the writers' attention. The very direct relation between the status of woman on the one hand and religion, morals and traditions on the other, may have deterred writers from facing the issue and thereby posing a challenge to the prevailing order.

The relation between man and woman, though present in almost every novel, is scarcely depicted adequately. The terms denoting the feelings of men and women about each other are often misleading and reveal a serious lack of understanding on the part of the

authors and their characters of the nature of human relations. Love, longing, tenderness, emotion, romance, partnership, often mean no more than sexual hunger.

The problems of divorced women, polygamy, domestic servants, the upbringing of children, bride money, the working woman, women nurses and the impact of education on the conservative families are hardly touched upon by the novelists.

From their portrayal of woman, it is evident that most authors' understanding of her psychology is minimal. Though little is known about their personal relations, a lack of sexual experience cannot be excluded, nor yet wishful thinking about the other sex during many years of social suppression in a closed society like that of Egypt.

It is hardly necessary to say that very few novelists were able to see and present the question of woman in its proper setting, that of socio-economic exploitation buttressed by society's conception and practice of religion. And almost none could see the organic relation between the emancipation of woman and of man.

The question of ignorance in a country like Egypt where illiteracy reaches 75 per cent, where old traditions, superstitions, poor education, the concentration of cultural centres in the main three or four cities and where the gap between school and social life is so great that social life has a de-educational effect on children and educated adults, is undoubtedly of paramount importance. Ignorance among the

peasantry and urban lower and lower middle classes is reflected in almost all the novels.

The novelists succeed in presenting many typical examples of the ignorant common people, officials, teachers, men of religion and even the so-called intellectuals. Yet ignorance as an issue concerning every individual, especially a writer, was scarcely considered (exceptions are Ṭāhā Ḥusain and Ṭāhir Lāshīn). The challenge that science and modern technology present to myths, traditions, and superstitions is not taken seriously. Regrettably enough, Haqqī in Qindīl Umm Hāshim arbitrarily rejects science and modern medicine for sentimental affiliation to tradition and superstition.

The concept of knowledge qualitatively and quantitatively strikes one as rather odd when spelled out by characters or authors, when they declare that they have read "everything" in art, philosophy, etc., in a limited period of time (e.g. Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm; Kamāl in the trilogy). When characters are made to present "new" ideas, real intellectual involvement on the part of the writer is often lacking and on many occasions clichés prevail. In connection with this issue, one encounters what is really an enormous deficiency in the novelists: the intellectual curiosity and the spirit which turn men into scientists, inventors, explorers, artists and revolutionaries are entirely absent from their books. When there is the slightest indication that it might appear, it is ruthlessly suppressed without any technical justification whilst still in its embryonic stage.

The casual way in which ignorance is usually displayed as part of everyday life, hardly impresses the general reader with the seriousness of the question. In the few cases where ignorance becomes an issue, the fundamental links with other social evils are overlooked. The function of ignorance in the historic, political, social and economic exploitation of a closed traditional society has evidently not been understood.

To sum up, the social problems of Egypt were and still are immense. With the rapid development of Egyptian society, new problems emerge which pile up on the old. Yet the way the Egyptian novelists have approached the problems is less than adequate if magnitude and urgency are considered. Involvement, comprehension and commitment lag far behind events. Vision, challenge, reasoning, based on scientific up-to-date platforms, are lacking. The novelists' belief in the vital role of literature in the process of change is not evident in their books. Seldom do they take the trouble to study a case, gather information, consider solutions and then present the outcome in novel form. Seldom, too, do they aim at rousing the public conscience by making the reader aware of the implications of facts they present, a task that demands understanding of class behaviour. The novelists' lack of insight into man's social nature and his role in history has proved an insuperable obstacle to the creation of a literary work of universal significance. Realism as conceived by the majority seems to denote copying the very language, the very

ideas and the uncritical assumptions of the life that surrounds them.[1] Critical realism hardly exists as the writers are not aware of the true nature of what they describe.

The novels of the first six decades of the twentieth century have failed to provide a comprehensive analysis of social problems. Man and society are not conceived as dynamic and creative. Whether the following decades will provoke original thought and a revaluation of the Egyptian scene in the works of future novelists remains to be seen.

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1. "It is the artist's function not to copy, but to synthesize; to eliminate from the gross confusion of actuality which is his raw material whatever is accidental, idle, irrelevant, and select for perpetuation that only which is appropriate and immortal". K. Graham, English Criticism of the Novel, 1865-1900 (Oxford, 1965), p. 38.

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